

I've Never Fallen From Quite This High

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I've Never Fallen From Quite This High

by [Scoops \(consciousness_streaming\)](#)

Summary

A phone call out of the blue after two months in Florida turns George's life up side down.

As one relationship falls apart, another falls together.

Notes

Thank you for joining me on this journey. I've been going crazy writing this for the last month or so. I think it'll be about 75,000 words when I'm done, based on the average length of each chapter. I'll be updating once a week until all 12 chapters are out. Most of this is already written, so I'm confident it won't go abandoned.

Title is from Billie Eilish's "Ocean Eyes"

Everything about their families is obviously made up, and made for peak drama at that. I don't know why I'm always bringing family into fics. Last names aren't used because I don't think they were ever explicitly shared with us. I've had to get creative to get around them. This is going to end happily, but it'll be a bit of a rocky ride until we get there.

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Chapter 1

Sapnap's burning the eggs. They're on stream in the kitchen of their new house, just minutes ago arguing about who would be a better cook, and Sapnap's already burning the eggs. This provides all the evidence George needs to confirm Sapnap is the worst cook in the house. Including Patches. She's never burnt the eggs, after all.

"You're burning them, idiot," George says helpfully, his chef hat falling into his eyes for the tenth time already. He gets to play judge today since this is his idea and his stream, and he already knows how he'll rule against Sapnap.

"No I'm not," Sapnap argues, but George can tell by his voice that he's arguing for the sake of arguing. He congratulates himself on this observation when Sapnap immediately removes the egg pan from the heat.

"Well, you are," Dream points out from the other side of the kitchen, barely in frame for the stream, like he's still self-conscious about his face. The internet's opinion is in: it's a good face. George concurs and so do several media outlets. After years of snapchats and blurry facetimes, he's able to admit Dream's got a good face. It's very... pleasant.

As the best cook of the three of them, Dream's job is the pancakes. American style. Now those George has big plans for.

"No I wasn't," Sapnap doubles down even as the burning smell drifts across the kitchen, pungent in George's nose.

"Well, then why did you take them off the stove?" Dream asks, logically. George doesn't hide his amusement, grinning conspiratorially at the camera to let chat in on the joke. None of them are close enough to read their audience's comments, it's all one big blur to George, he can only guess what they're saying.

"Shut up," Sapnap slaps the pan back on the burner, but twists the dial to a lower heat. George makes a note to not eat more of those than he needs to for the stream. Bare fucking minimum.

The idea came to him yesterday afternoon. Their sleep schedules, always fucked up, synced perfectly yesterday for the first time since George moved in two months ago. At first it was the jet lag, then Sapnap stayed up too late on stream with Punz, then Dream's insomnia reared its ugly head while he worked himself too hard, until they had mere hours for all three of them to enjoy together.

They spent the entire day together, watching movies, wrestling over the remote, and ordering a huge amount of food to be delivered. This is why he came to Florida, to be close to these two idiots. Dream started in again on them not ordering as much food and then Sapnap pointed out that only Dream really knows how to cook and they can't expect Dream's mum to come over everyday and cook for them, and then Dream said that he should stop being lazy. He should at least be able to make breakfast, that's easy enough.

And suddenly inspiration struck George. "Let's do that cooking stream tomorrow," George had said, Dream's suggestion of breakfast foods sticking in his brain, nothing so hard they can't mess around, nothing that needs a lot of focus or attention. "We already have eggs and like the stuff for pancakes, right? Let's just make those on stream."

“We can see who’s a better cook,” Sapnap’s eyes had lit up. “Me or you, Georgie. I mean, obviously it’s me, though.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” George had thought of Sapnap, first thing in the morning, looking hopeful that Dream will wake up and make him something to eat before giving up and taking a power bar. It’s always so sad, like one of those puppy adoption ads.

“Well, I can be the judge,” Dream offered and George nixed that idea.

“It’ll be my stream. I’ll be the judge. We can face off another time, Sap. I want Dream to make the pancakes since he feels so strongly about mine.”

“You mean your crepes?”

“They’re pancakes, idiot,” George argued for the thousandth time. They’ll still be arguing about this when the world ends.

“The only cake I want to eat is yours,” Dream had said and both Sapnap and George booed him, laughing hysterically and falling all over themselves. Dream says these things with no hesitation, the effect worse than it’s been all these years online—George blushing and Dream all proud of himself like a peacock, tail bright and bold.

They didn’t wake up in the morning, but they all woke up within ten minutes of each other, and that’s good enough for George. He strong armed Sapnap into borrowing his camera for a second angle and then asked Dream to help him get everything set up to stream. George can do it, has done it before on his own, but Dream’s so much faster at it and eager to assist if George just tells him how great he is at it, praises him. He’s a pretty simple man at the end of the day, and George has his number. Between the two of them, they were ready to stream in an hour. A new record for George.

Not to leave Sapnap out, George asked him to go to the store for more ingredients and maybe a couple frozen pizzas for dinner so they won’t have to cook again. Yeah, they already have eggs because Dream’s a freak who refuses to eat anything else and he buys them in like truly staggering amounts, but they also needed things like syrup for the pancakes and powdered sugar. Maybe some apple juice.

Now, here they are, Sapnap’s burning the eggs and Dream’s teasing him and George has one eye on the chat and the other on the fire extinguisher and he’s bursting at the seams with happiness. His best friends are buffoons, the stupidest mother fuckers on the planet, and he would only say so under duress, but he’s very fond of them.

Like he can sense it, Dream chooses that moment to look up and he smiles at George, a small thing that softens his eyes with affection. He does that sometimes, reads George like a billboard. To everyone else on the planet, George is an obscure medieval text written by half blind monks in candlelight. He likes being unknowable, unpredictable.

George doesn’t meet his eyes for long, the chat’s already spamming hearts and he can’t stand being so seen by them, caught wrong footed. The stream continues and George lets his two friends bicker for the camera, joining in when he can emotionally devastate one or both of them.

Sapnap is suggesting using hot sauce on his eggs under the impression that the sauce will hide the burn taste when George’s phone rings.

Frowning, George knows it can only be one person since the other person who’s call goes through

Do Not Disturb—which he always uses while streaming—is staring right at him, curiosity burning on his face. There are two people who can best his Do Not Disturb, only two.

He stares down at the phone, a sense of foreboding fills him.

“Go take that, George, we’ll entertain your stream.”

Grateful for the permission, and sending a look of thanks to Dream, George leaves the kitchen to answer the call.

“Mum?” He asks, stomach dropping. She never calls unscheduled. Not to say they don’t talk, because they do every couple of weeks, but she always texts him first to let him know when she’s planning on calling. Between time zones and his crazy sleep schedule, it’s nice of her. An unprompted phone call in the middle of a stream makes George think it’s an emergency.

His heartbeat speeds up. What bad news is he about to hear?

“George,” his mum greets him, voice bright. Too bright. “Hi, honey, how are you?”

“Mum, it’s late for you,” he checks his phone for the time and does the mental math to calculate it’s way past her bedtime. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, nothing to worry about, nothing to worry—” she stops herself abruptly and George can’t read her tone and it throws him off balance. He’s always been able to read her, always knows how she’s feeling. “I was wondering, though, if I could come stay with you for a week or so.”

And now he knows something is wrong because his mother doesn’t make any impulsive plans and she definitely wouldn’t call him at this time of night to ask to come to another country to see him. Not when he’s only been gone two months. They went longer without seeing each other when he lived an hour away by train.

“Mum, is everything okay?” a stupid question, really. He hates that he has to ask the next one, “No one’s dead, are they?”

“Of course not, ‘course not,” she says and though it does reassure him, it does nothing for the anxiety building in his chest. “Can’t a mother want to come see her son? I just want to come on a quick holiday.”

Now he doesn’t believe that for a second, but he also can’t deny her request. If something’s going on and she needs him, he’ll be there in a heartbeat. Without questioning her further, he says yes.

“Great, thank you, honey. I just bought a ticket, so—”

“When are you coming?” George asks, running a hand through his hair. It’s getting long again and Dream’s made some heavy handed hints that he needs a haircut, but he has no idea where to go in this new country. A problem for another time.

“Is tomorrow too soon?” she asks and now he’s sure there’s something wrong. Is she running from someone?

“Mum, are you safe? What’s going on? Why are you—”

“Is tomorrow okay, George?” she asks again, too politely. God, maybe whoever is after her is listening in right now.

“Yeah, sure, Mum.”

“Oh, perfect!” She’s too bright, too plastic. He can’t put his finger on it and it’ll drive him crazy until she’s in front of him and he can get it out of her. She’s acting like he’s some long distance relative she’s begging to stay with, not her son.

They’re close. Not as close as they used to be when he was growing up, sure. But closer than he is with his dad. They’ve never talked to each other like this. He doesn’t like it.

A thread of a memory stirs up and he pulls on it until the thought unravels. She’s talking like the time her mother died. George was young then, too young to understand where Grandma went, but he remembers his mother’s robotic facade. Surrounded by extended family, burdened by the funeral arrangements that she put together on her own, she hid herself behind this android version of herself, too accommodating to everyone else, too afraid to ruffle any feathers and show her grief. George hated it as a kid and he hates it now.

God, who died?

He talked to Neve the other day, she has finals coming up so she said she wouldn’t be as available. Not that he and his sister talk every day, but they keep in touch. She likes to send him pictures of people she catches wearing Dream Team merch. It’s not Neve, is it? Please don’t let anything have happened to Neve.

“I’ll forward you the details, hmm? Can you pick me up from the airport, or…”

“I can’t drive, Mum,” he reminds her, “but I’ll get Dream or Sapnap to help me pick you up.”

“Oh, you don’t need to bother them. I can order an uber.”

George shakes his head even though she can’t see him. Dream would know he was shaking his head were they on a call like this. Dream knows everything he does by sound alone. “It’s not a problem, Mum. We’ll come get you. There’s a gate in the neighborhood anyway. The uber won’t be able to get to the house.”

The gate was the only thing Dream insisted they have at the new house. With plans of a face reveal on the horizon and George added to the house and guaranteed to drum up more attention, neither Sapnap nor George fought him on it. Security gets more important the more their Youtube and twitch numbers go up. Sapnap had a stalker late last year, and they couldn’t even talk about it online because that would just encourage more people to do the same thing, get their fave to talk about them, give them attention. Between online doxxing and the daily death threats, they went the extra mile for a home where they would feel safe.

“Okay, okay,” his mum says, the cracks in her armor more noticeable now, “well then I’ll see you soon. I’ll text you when I land.”

“Alright,” George says, unsure what else there is say, but “be safe.”

“Cheers, hon.”

The call disconnects and George stares at his phone until it goes black. A two minute phone call and now his entire week is wrecked. They didn’t have any scheduled plans, George told Quackity he’d be on his stream in a couple days, but he can always cancel or re-schedule if he needs to. Quackity will understand.

His mother is coming here. He doesn’t know what to think. She’s hiding something and he

doesn't like it. He's less convinced someone died the longer he thinks about it. If something happened to his sister or dad, then he'd need to go to England rather than the other way around, right? Like, they'd have to have the funeral there. It would really make no sense for his mother to fly to him here, rather than recall him back to her.

He still sends a quick check in text to Neve, keeping it vague and light so as not to distract her from her finals.

Slightly comforted, George takes a deep breath and taps back into his streaming personality. There's time to think about this later. Now he needs to go entertain 230,000 people. No pressure, though.

Stepping back into the kitchen, he's glad to see there's no evidence of fire. It's a low threshold, but you never know with Sapnap. He managed to almost drown himself in the bath the other day.

"Everything okay?" Dream asks quietly when he notices him. Maybe he sees it in George's eyes, maybe he senses it in that way he has of reading him entirely, every thought and feeling bare to him and making George lash out like a cornered cat. Maybe it's something more obvious than that, he doesn't know. But Dream sends him a look, a promise that they'll talk later, reassurance that he's got his back, and George nods.

"George!" Sapnap also picks up on George's strangeness and is better at smoothing things over for the chat. George appreciates him. Sapnap's really come a long way in front of the camera and he shines. "Come look at my eggs. Actually, try them. I think they're ready." He takes a fork and stabs some eggs, holding it up to George's mouth like he's feeding a baby.

George looks down cross eyed at the grossest eggs he's ever seen in his life. He raises a hand to block the fork from getting even close to his lips, "Did you smother them in hot sauce?"

Dream huffs a laugh behind him, "He thinks it'll disguise the taste."

"That's not true at all," Sapnap whines in protest, "just a small flavor enhancer."

"Small? There's more hot sauce than egg on that fork, idiot."

He gets through the rest of the stream, judging Sapnap's eggs to be "foul" when he finally chokes them down. The three of them end up mukbanging Dream's pancakes and answering fan questions. The pancakes are amazing. George and Sapnap make Dream promise on stream to make them more often. Dream doesn't promise every day, won't promise that, but he gives in on "special occasions" and with a quick glance at Sapnap, George can already tell their definitions of "special occasions" are going to differ vastly from Dream's. He looks forward to ganging up on Dream with Sapnap if the result is these pancakes.

George raids Boomer, who's playing something stupid with Punz, and waves good bye to chat, feeling his face fall the moment he clicks End Stream and confirms it's over.

He heaves a sigh.

"So what was that about?" Sapnap asks, scraping the eggs into the bin. No matter how much he argued, they are inedible. Even the raccoons who are obsessed with their rubbish aren't going to touch these things.

Dream picks up their plates and washes them off before putting them in the dishwasher, the machine needs a bit of help with viscous substances like syrup. George takes the forks and hands them over, his fingers grazing Dream's. One day he'll get used to these casual touches.

Dream, keeper of the George Lore, asks, “Was it your mom?” since he knows that only his mum would be able to get through his Do Not Disturb. Well, besides Dream.

George nods. He’s not sure how to tell them she’s coming to visit. He didn’t even think to ask their permission before saying she could come, but what was he supposed to do?

“What’d she want?”

“She was acting really strange, actually.”

Dream straightens up, alert, all at once. “Is she okay?”

George shrugs, “I don’t think anyone died, but um... She did ask if she can come visit.”

“Sweet,” Sapnap slings the egg pan into the sink, hoping Dream will start cleaning it. “My hot wife is finally coming to see me.”

“Shut up,” George snaps, and Sapnap’s hands come up defensively like George threw a punch at him. Admittedly, it’s out of character for George. He and Sapnap like to mess around and give each other shit, up to and including mum jokes, but under these circumstances, George can’t take it. He’s too worried and his nerves are worn thin.

“When is she coming?” Dream asks, raising a hand to cover Sapnap’s mouth because he never learned to stop while he’s ahead. It’s not enough, though, George can already hear the smart ass remark he would say if allowed. It rings around in his ears.

“Um, tomorrow?” George means for it to be a fact, but it comes out like a question. He didn’t ask permission and feels like shit about it. This is their home, too. “Which reminds me, can one of you help me pick her up from the airport?”

Dream stares at him, searching, while the suds in the sink pile higher. “Yeah, sure.” Like it’s easy for him.

George feels the need to explain more, “I just—something’s wrong, I think.”

“What do you mean?”

“She was acting so weird. Like—”

“She doesn’t normally call like that,” Dream remarks and of course Dream knows that. He’s been there when George had to hang up with Dream to take his mother’s scheduled call, he knows how she operates.

“Exactly,” George says, giving up on appearing like he’s helping clean and sitting at the breakfast bar, “and then she asked to come visit for a week, like tomorrow. She never does that. She hasn’t been on a holiday in.... Way too long, I guess.”

“And you’ve only just got here,” Sapnap points out, now pushing the pancake batter mixing bowl towards Dream at the sink.

“Yeah,” he places both elbows on the counter and puts his head in his hands, “like I said, it’s strange.”

“Well, I for one look forward to meeting her,” Dream says, giving in and scrubbing the egg pan. Sapnap smirks and George watches it happen. “I’ll drive you tomorrow.”

George pulls up his phone to see if she emailed the details to him yet, filtering out the sounds of washing dishes. He breathes a sigh of relief at Neve's answering text on his lock screen saying she's fine, just swamped.

Mum already emailed him. He forwards it to Dream without thinking, he'll need to know for logistics. Dream knows how long it'll take to get to the airport, and how traffic will effect their route. George has no concept of how far away it is because on his ride from the airport Sapnap took the long way to make Dream jealous, playing loud rap songs while they flew down the highway, minutes passing in seconds because they were enjoying their time together.

Dream hands the wet pan over to Sapnap who caves at the look on Dream's face and grabs a towel to dry it. The three of them fall into a comfortable silence, not unusual after a high energy stream like the one they just did. George spends the time watching his friends, dismantling the streaming equipment, and worrying about his mum.

Sapnap drifts off to his room when the kitchen is back in order, taking his spare camera with him. George thanks him for its use, but otherwise, the mood of the evening is very relaxed. Dream looks like he wants to leave, too, so it surprises George when he suggests they watch a movie.

"You're going to be in your head anyway," he reasons, "might as well not pretend to work."

"I streamed," George says following Dream into the living room, "that's working."

Dream waits for George to sit in his favorite spot and then drapes the OU blanket George commandeered as his own over his lap. They watch enough movies in this room to have a set routine. Maybe that wouldn't appeal to anyone else, but George likes the predictability of it. He likes knowing that he'll sit on the left side of the couch, snuggled under the OU blanket, and Dream will sit on the right side of the couch, close enough to hit him but far enough that they aren't touching all the time.

When Sapnap joins, he likes to sit in the arm chair, legs pumped out in front of him with a forest green blanket and Patches triumphantly in his lap. She prefers to sit in the armchair and while Sapnap thinks it's because she likes him more than Dream and George, Dream tells George in confidence that she just likes the chair and Sapnap is in her way. It makes him giggle, but they let Sapnap think he's winning the war on Patches.

George catches her in his own room often enough to know that she likes him. There's a patch of sunlight between 10:00am and 12:00pm that lights up his bed, and around those hours Patches makes herself comfortable there, whether George is asleep or not. He's woken up several times now to fur in his face.

He doesn't hate it.

"Anything in particular you want to watch?" Dream asks, remote in hand and Netflix up on the television. They usually start with Netflix and if nothing jumps out at them, they'll switch to one of the other streaming services. Between Dream and Sapnap, they have a subscription to every single one. The perks of being millionaires in their twenties.

"No horror," George says unnecessarily.

"No shit," Dream switches on some dumb teen show and they both fall into the stupid story line.

Dream's good at this—taking care of people. In their conversation before the stream, Dream talked about the prep work he was going to get done with Callahan this evening for a stream, and a call he

wanted to make to HBomb about lore, so George knows this is for him. Dream sacrificed his time to support George in the way that makes him the most comfortable—a quiet room where they don't talk and George doesn't feel watched, but also doesn't feel alone.

He'll never be able to find the words. When he thinks about why he spent so long trying to come to Florida, when he had to explain to his parents, to his uni friends, to even his British Youtube friends why visiting wasn't enough, that he needed to live here for real, it's this: it's being known so thoroughly, that his friends can give him what he needs without him asking, and vice versa. It's a warm blanket supporting an American football team he cares nothing for but indisputably belongs to him. It's a soft touch against his foot, their cat greeting him as a household member. It's a shared shampoo bottle in the hallway bathroom, his hair the same floral scent as Sapnap's. It's ignoring the dialogue of the show playing to listen to Dream's breathing beside him and feeling better for it.

Thoughts like these are dangerous, that Dream might care about him as much as he cares about Dream. He gives himself to the count of sixty to think them, and then he puts them nicely back in their box. Dream doesn't belong to him, as much as he feels like he belongs to Dream.

He's careful with Dream. He made rules for himself long before his plane touched down, rules set to save himself from heartbreak, to preserve his lifestyle, and hold fast to the best friendships he's ever had. He sacrificed too much to make it to Florida, to throw his hat in the same ring as Sapnap and Dream, to mess everything up with unrequited feelings.

He needs his box, the place he stores everything up so he doesn't have to think about it, so he doesn't let those things disrupt his day to day life. And these thoughts of how Dream cares for him, well, that train of thought is barreling off the track, inviting catastrophe.

The first rule is, he doesn't let Dream in his room. Not in a mean or rude way, merely a boundary. He never explicitly says this to Dream, but he holds himself to it. If he were to have Dream spend a significant amount of time in there, George would never want him to leave, he might beg him to stay, and that's a problem. So George seeks Dream out in his office. That's where he spends most of his time anyway. They spend a lot of time there together, like George always thought they would. Lately, they've been playing each other Tik Toks and messing around on Twitter, challenging each other to find the most depraved tweets and daring each other to press like. It's fun.

George has only been in Dream's room a handful of times, usually at Dream's behest when he's tired of sitting in his chair. And George never overstays his welcome. He always leaves, doesn't want to get too comfortable there, start thinking he's more welcome than he is.

Sapnap likes to joke that he never wonders if he's dreaming that George lives with them now, because George leaves his shit everywhere—his dirty socks on the coffee table in the living room, water glasses on the kitchen counter he doesn't put away because he's just going to be thirsty again in an hour and need more water, a used towel on the floor in the bathroom he shares with Sapnap, half a banana in the car once.

He doesn't bring anything but himself and his phone into Dream's room. He doesn't leave evidence.

This feels significant to him, that Dream won't wake up in the middle of the night, see his discarded hoodie and think George is disrupting his space. Or that George will bombard him in the safety of his room like he feels entitled to it, like he doesn't respect Dream's space. George knows he can be too much, and he doesn't ever want Dream to have to tell him that to his face, to tell him he's not welcome.

George would rather die.

Maybe it's crazy, but in George's mind, if he doesn't leave a trace, the line between them is still intact. He knows what the line means to him, it's the status quo. What he doesn't know is if Dream has his own line. He surely doesn't seem to. He touches George as much as Sapnap, clasps him on the back when he laughs, pulls astray eyelashes off his cheeks, leans over him to watch the TikTok on George's phone.

He invites him into his room effortlessly, and lets him leave whenever. He doesn't cross the threshold of George's room, but he adds things George seems to favor to their weekly grocery list. Even things George doesn't say out loud that he likes, he just knows, pays attention.

And then he constantly asks George his thoughts. Dream consults George on almost everything, loves to hear his opinion even if he doesn't agree. Half of their dynamic is arguing back and forth and George isn't sure which one of them enjoys it more. George likes bickering with Dream more than he likes small talk with strangers on dating apps, more than he likes dark clubs with half drunk wandering hands, more than he likes flirty DMs from instagram models.

And that's what's truly dangerous.

Back in the box, back in the box, back in the box. As much as an ocean can fit in a box. George slams the lid.

The show moves to the second episode without him even noticing. Dream's barely paying attention, eyes on his phone. Probably Twitter. Suddenly he's tired.

"Want that pizza now?" George stands up, needing something to do to corral these thoughts. He doesn't normally have a problem keeping them under wraps. Something about this phone call, the not knowing, leaves him adrift.

"Sounds good to me," Dream agrees easily, pausing the show like either one of them are invested in it. He's courteous like that. "Want company?"

Company for what? To push the pre-heat button, wait ten minutes, put the pizza in, wait another fifteen minutes? "Yeah."

"Okay," Dream turns the show off completely now. George couldn't tell you the name of it if a gun was to his head.

In the kitchen, George pushes the button and then plops himself on the counter next to the sink. Dream reaches for the cabinet behind him, his long arm passing close to George's head and his hips a hair's breath from George's knees. He fidgets slightly while Dream gets two water glasses down. The air returns to George's body when Dream moves away, opening the fridge for the Brita filter. He fills up both glasses, juggling them with his bear paw hands, and George doesn't admit he's impressed. Such a stupid thing to be impressed by, but it's just one in thousands of impressive things about Dream.

"Here," Dream hands one of the glasses over to George. He takes a sip, the water too cold for his teeth. He sets it on the counter next to him to let it warm up a bit before he downs the rest of it.

"Thanks," George says. "Can you get the pizzas out of the freezer while you're up?"

Dream busies himself on pizza prep. This wasn't George's intention when he accepted company but Dream can't help himself and George likes it anyway. Two pizzas, sans wrapping, sit on the counter next to George, waiting for the oven's confirmation it's ready to cook, and Dream tackles

the now clean dishwasher, unloading everything from their earlier stream in an efficient manner.

George watches silently, leaning out of the way when Dream reaches for that same cabinet again. He could move, he tells himself, but he was here first. He staked his claim on this counter top and it's not his fault Dream keeps invading his space. He drinks his water slowly.

"It'll be strange having my mum here," George says. Dream pauses the smallest bit before he continues putting the utensils back in their organized drawer.

"I mean, she hasn't seen much of this side of my life," George picks at his nail while the forks make a tink-tink sound as they rejoin the herd.

Dream closes the drawer with his hip and turns to look at George. "Your online life? Your life in Florida?"

"I mean like Youtube," George says, "Streaming. She doesn't get it."

"You never talked about her much," Dream says, a slow pitch to George that he can choose to hit or let pass him by. This is his way of saying he's willing to listen. But he's not pushing.

George pulls harder on the skin around his nail until it bleeds. "We used to be really close."

Dream, with nothing left to clean in this sparkling kitchen, comes closer to him. He takes George's hand in his own, eyebrows furrowed in concern at the blood. "Why'd you do that?" He moves George's arm under the faucet and lets the water drip down on it, cleaning it. Then he looks under the sink, for reasons revealed to George only when he pops back up with a first aid kit.

"What happened?" Dream asks as he pulls out a band-aid from the kit. It's red and boxy, reminding him of the med kits in Fortnite.

"I dunno, just pulled too hard. It's stupid."

"No, idiot. I mean with your mom," Dream pulls George's finger to his chest and sets the band-aid carefully on his finger. George's heart beats fast in his chest and he doesn't know why, "You said you used to be close?"

He pulls his covered finger out of Dream's grasp, unable to let himself linger. Dream doesn't move away, his body between George's knees, his collar bones at eye level. "I'm not sure what happened." He looks up, the concern hasn't left Dream's face yet. He raises one shoulder in a half shrug, "One day she was like super Mum, you know? Our house was the cool house to go to. We had the best snacks, she knew all my friends' names, she helped us on the hard levels of those old PC games."

"The Harry Potter one?" Dream asks softly.

"Yeah, and others. I think she used to like games, but my memory is fuzzy."

The oven beeps and Dream shoves the pizzas in. George has a strange vision of him feeding pizzas to Jabba the Hutt like that and the thought is so strange and out of place that it makes him want to laugh.

"So when did that change?" Dream closes the oven door, sets a timer, and comes right back to where he was standing before.

George thinks about the question for a while. The truth is, he's not really sure. In the way that little

kids do, he didn't spend a lot of time thinking about his parents' motivations or anything—their wants, desires, fears, what drives them. His mum loved him and his sister, that much he's never questioned.

"I suppose it was an age thing? Like a growing up thing," he says to Dream. "In that way that teenagers pull away from their parents."

Dream nods along and George continues, "I started getting really into Minecraft, learning to code, the technical things that can be hard for people to follow. Mum definitely couldn't follow that stuff and," how to put this into words, "it's like she didn't even try?"

He takes one last sip of his water, finishing the glass, and says, "Which was different than how she used to be. Like, whatever weird little kid hobby I got into, she would throw herself into it too and we'd figure it out together. We used to build these crazy Lego builds, you have no idea."

Dream smiles sweetly at him and George can't stand to see that look for him. He plows on, "Like, I'm sure looking back on it she spent hundreds of pounds on Lego shit we didn't need. I think I heard my parents fighting about it once or twice, but she didn't let it stop her."

"You were a spoiled little princess," Dream laughs easy at him.

He rolls his eyes, "Hey, I wasn't as bad as my sister. Neve had so many clothes and Barbies, it was ridiculous."

"Okay, Mr. Hypebeast," Dream teases with an eye roll of his own.

"Shut up," George swings his foot out to kick Dream, aim purposefully bad. "Anyway, once I grew up a bit it was like she pulled away, no longer had time for my hobbies. By the time I went to Uni, we only really saw each other at dinner. Even now, when we talk, it's like superficial stuff, you know?"

"That's sad," Dream says and, yeah, George thinks so too. Dream stayed closed to his mum. She's over all the time, bringing home made food, desserts, little decorative touches that make this house feel like a home. George adores her.

"So it's weird she wants to come, right?" George asks, failing to make sense of this.

"She's your mom. Maybe something's going on, but she's reaching out to you. That's a good thing."

"Yeah," George agrees, trying in vain to cling to Dream's optimism. "She didn't want me to move here, you know."

"Really?" Now that he thinks about it, George might not have mentioned that to Dream in fear that he would put too much weight on his mother's words and talk him out of it. "Too far away?"

"And she doesn't know you," George says, bitter because he tried so many times in that year after Uni when he lived with his parents to get them to see how much he liked streaming, making Youtube videos with his friends, impacting people's lives and trying to give credit to Dream's vision, to see what he sees in Dream, how special he is, "Or Sapnap. She wasn't a fan of me moving in with total strangers."

"Well, after this we won't be strangers anymore."

That's a terrifying thought. And also hypocritical of George when all he wanted for so long was for

her to *know* him, *see* him, and a big part of him is Dream. And Sapnap.

He barely tastes his pizza.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Next chapter out 3/18 because that's my birthday and i deserve a little treat

Hope you like it :)

Dream wakes him the next morning, long before Patches' beloved sun spot arrives on his bed. It's early. And it took forever for him to get to sleep last night.

"C'mon, we're gonna be late to pick up your *mum*," Dream says, mocking George's accent on the last word. George opens a bleary eye, so very comfortable and warm under these blankets, to see Dream is dressed in jeans and a Sooners t-shirt, freshly shaved with water still clinging to his hair.

"You have jeans on," George's voice is raspy with disuse. It doesn't escape George's notice that Dream is in his room. For the first time.

Dream shakes him one last time, says, "I've got a good impression to make, lazy," and then walks out of the room, leaving the door wide open to George's annoyance.

He's got a thing about closed doors, okay?

Ten minutes later finds them backing out of the driveway, Dream's hand coming up to the headrest behind George who is trying very hard not to stare at Dream's arm. He breathes easier once they're out on the road and Dream puts both hands on the wheel. Somehow this is the first time they've ridden in a car together alone. He looks natural in the driver's seat. Like in anything Dream does well, he's confident, cocky, annoyingly hot about it. George feels safer with him in control than Sappnap, not that he would share that opinion with either of them for vastly different reasons.

He always feels safe with Dream.

George busies himself finding music for them to listen to, drown out the thoughts of how the morning sun highlights Dream's hair perfectly, settling on loud Travis Scott to help him wake up. The beat bangs through the speakers and George focuses solely on the music and not these thoughts about his best friend. When the song ends, George puts on another, even louder song and Dream frowns in disapproval, but he lets it go. They fly along the interstate.

"Has she texted yet?" Dream yells over the music. He could have turned it down, but he doesn't. His fingers tap against the steering wheel, the sound lost to the Quedeca tune blasting out of the speakers now.

George checks his phone and shakes his head. "I guess we should just park." In his own arrival, Sappnap timed it so perfectly that George made it through customs, grabbed his bags, and exited the terminal right when Sappnap pulled his Tesla into the pick up area. He slid the bags in, and off they went.

Dream's anxiety forced them to get here way earlier than necessary, so parking it is. Her flight isn't even scheduled to land for another fifteen minutes.

“Should we grab breakfast?” George asks, just as he notices his personal hunger bar is low.

Thirty minutes later and feeling more alive, George closes the car door behind him, evidence of their McDonald’s breakfast hidden. His mum is here and on her way up. He feels nervous and ridiculous about being nervous. This is his mum! Why are his hands shaking? Dream walks around the car and they stroll into the airport together, face masks on.

The fans aren’t expecting him at the airport right now, let alone Dream, so he’s not worrying about being swarmed. Dream’s face is known to the internet, there are no more mysteries left, and the burden of secrecy that shackled them for so long disappeared. They’re unfettered. It’s nice to walk side by side with Dream.

His phone buzzes and George responds quickly to his mum, giving directions on where they are so she can meet up. He reads between the lines of her words and knows she’s tired. She’ll fit right in to this little group.

Dream entertains him by talking about the people around them. To George’s horror, he even makes small talk with a middle aged man waiting for his wife to come home. They exchange small words, volleying a conversation, and it’s so foreign to George. The wrinkles around Dream’s eyes betray the smile hidden by his face mask.

Like he can sense George’s mood, Dream gives up on the stranger and teases George until they have a good banter going, making bets on which new arrivals belong with which person waiting patiently. Dream even buys them a hot chocolate to split.

The woman who approaches him later has the same face as his mum, but everything else is starkly different—her hair is cut short, blonder somehow in a way he knows is manufactured, her clothes are newer and in a fashion he’s never seen her adopt. She looks sophisticated, elegant, not like his mum. Her face is still all her, kindness in every line and love in the sparkle in her eye.

“George,” she says in relief, throwing her bag down and pulling him into her arms tightly. He doesn’t dare complain. He didn’t realize until this moment how much he missed her, until her perfume is in his head and her heartbeat is up against his, elevated from her walk.

“Hi, Mum,” he whispers into her ear, this hug already longer than the one he gave her two months ago in a different airport. Then, they’d been subdued—George, eager and excited and nervous altogether, his mum all worry and sadness, but reluctant acceptance.

Finally, she pulls back to look at him and he can see through her veneer. Something is wrong. She’s *not* doing well, despite the new clothes and the expensive haircut. Without thinking about it too much, he gives her another brief hug.

This time, when they part, her face almost crumbles right there. He can tell she’s on the cusp of tears, an event he can count on one hand happening in his presence, ever.

“Who’s this?” she asks, taking a deep breath to try to control herself. It’s the same thing he does when things get too overwhelming. She pastes a smile on her face and turns to Dream with her hand outstretched.

“This is Dream, Mum,” George says, pretty sure she already knows this. He’s definitely shown her pictures and videos with Sapnap’s face cam on so by the power of deduction she would have figured out this is his other best friend. He tries to see Dream through her eyes—tall, solidly built even if he’s no body builder, blond hair shaggy but suited to him, friendliness seeping out of every pore. He’s not sure if Dream is actually good looking or if his affection for him has turned him into

the best looking person he's ever met.

Dream's hand engulfs hers when they shake. It's funny to see two of the most formative people in his life touching in front of him, interacting. "Nice to meet you, Mrs.—"

"You can call me Kate," she says warmly. "It's strange, after all, when your kids are grown and their friends still call you—" her hand gestures wildly in the air, like she can't find the rest of the words in her sentence, but it makes George smile. Some things never change.

"I know what you mean," Dream says, "it's a strange mark of time when you get to start calling adults by their first names. When I worked at Apple—" George internally rolls his eyes, but it's a good move for Dream, something tangible she can understand, a way for her to relate to him on something that shows *prestige*, makes him seem successful in a way adults can get behind, "the hardest part was remembering to use my co-workers' first names."

"Do you want me to call you Dream, or is that only an online friends thing?" she asks genuinely. It makes George smile because he's not sure he explained online etiquette to her, he would have if she'd ever asked. He loves that she asks, because it was George who introduced Dream, who offered his name, and not Dream's choice. He guilty thinks he should have asked, shouldn't have presumed, shouldn't have made that decision for Dream. It's just that in his mind, he's *Dream*.

Dream grabs her bag, turns it upright, "My name is Clay, if you're more comfortable calling me that, but you're welcome to use Dream," and starts herding them towards the exit with it rolling behind him.

They walk to the car and George asks politely about the flight. It was "horrendous" in her words, but she's glad it's over. He nods along, letting Dream navigate them through groups of people, Disney bound families, and a corporate retreat.

"You need a haircut, honey," Mum tells him when they reach the car. Her hands run through it like he's five instead of twenty five.

"That's what I've been telling him," Dream says excitedly, glad to have made an ally so quickly.

"You have not," George argues because that's patently not true, "you've just hinted at it. Idiot."

"You still know I think it's too long, I think that counts."

"It doesn't count if you don't actually say it," George presses. "Besides, I can guess at a lot of your opinions, that's more of me being smart than you being such a good communicator."

"I think if the point gets across, it counts. Communication doesn't always have to be verbal, George," Dream points out and it drives him crazy.

"Whatever," George says, not enough sleep in him to put up a better fight than this.

"Do you want me to trim it while I'm here?" she asks while Dream opens the trunk and places her bag inside.

"No," he says, stubbornly. If he was asked before this conversation he would have agreed he needed a haircut, but now with these two ganging up on him, he's going to dig in. "It's fine."

Dream gets in the driver's seat and George opens the passenger door for his mum. She thanks him as she slides in, putting her purse at her feet. George is thankful they stashed the McDonald's trash in the glove compartment before they left.

“Thank you so much for picking me up,” she says when they back out of the space and start ambling to the parking deck exit. “You can take me to a hotel, Dream.”

“What? No,” Dream protests, “I thought you were staying with us.”

“Oh, that’s okay,” his mum says but George starts thinking and, yeah, she should probably stay with them. The money alone. He knows the cost of a flight from London to Orlando, especially at short notice. He used to troll all the cheap airfare websites looking at the prices, fantasizing about jumping on one of those flights.

His parents have money, they’re comfortable. His dad has some big fuck you job, not that George could explain what he does. Heaven forbid he actually talk about it, but he makes a lot of money. Enough that his mother hasn’t had to work since George was little, before they moved to Brighton. They live in a nice house in a nice area and he’s never wanted for anything. But they don’t have excessive money, holiday on no notice money, or even whole new wardrobe and haircut money. Especially with one kid still in university. An expensive flight is one thing, but a week or more staying in a hotel around Disney where the prices skyrocket? He doesn’t think it’s smart.

“Stay with us, Mum,” George says, leaning forward from the backseat, “we’ll get more time together that way.”

“And we’re in the suburbs,” Dream adds, combining their persuasive powers together and no one stands a chance, “any hotel with last minute vacancies is going to be super far away and super expensive.”

“You’re sure it’s okay? I don’t want to put you out, I know I—” his mother never sounds this unsure and George doesn’t like hearing her this way.

“You’re staying with us,” Dream says with authority. It’s funny watching his mother nod, taking this twenty-two year old’s word. She probably didn’t really want to stay in a hotel, anyway.

“I didn’t realize you boys had a guest room. Just how big is this house of yours?”

“You can have my room,” Dream offers, instead of explaining that their guest room technically has no bed and just piles and piles of fanart of themselves, and doubles as his office and gym, “it’s the biggest and most comfortable.”

“I’m not taking your room, Dream,” his mother says, staring his friend down. As eager as George is to see who can be more stubborn, his money is on Dream, neither of them are correct here.

“You’re taking my room,” he says because it makes the most sense. His room is barely broken in, half his stuff is still in boxes because he’s been too lazy to open them, instead re-wearing the same three outfits. He’s still not used to the bed, so it’ll be the least disruptive for him to bunker down on the couch. And the couch is super comfortable so it’s not like it’s a hardship or anything, he’s taken many naps on the thing already.

“She can have my room, George, I don’t mind,” Dream says and George thinks he’s taking this good impression thing way too far at this point. “It has the en suite anyway, she wouldn’t have to share bathrooms with Sap—Nick.”

“She’s my mum, idiot. She’ll be more comfortable with my stuff,” he shuts Dream down and surprisingly, the argument works. Dream nods like he hadn’t considered that angle and George counts this as a rare victory. He out-stubborned both of them. And on no sleep.

“Thank you, sweetie, are you sure you don’t mind?”

“Of course not,” he assures her. The rest of the car ride consists of asking more questions about the travel here and making plans for things she wants to do in Orlando, Dream adding helpful suggestions of places they could go and telling personal anecdotes about each such place. His mum falls into Dream’s engaging story telling much like everyone else in the world and George feels a spike of hope. He wants his mum to get it, get why he’s here in Florida for good, to see what he sees in Dream, why he’s so— well, he wants them to get along.

Dream shows his pass to the security guard and they’re waved through the wrought iron gates. George catches the surprise in his mother’s eyes in the rear view mirror. He continues to watch her expression while they pull up to the house, curious to see what she thinks of the area. It’s impressive and a far cry from Brighton with palm trees dotting the landscape. The houses are large and spread apart.

It’s hard to tell from the road, but most of them have pools. Dream explained a long time ago to him that many houses in Florida have pools, not just mega mansions or whatever, even regular family houses. It’s bizarre to George to have such a luxury, though at least the Florida weather allows for the pools to be used year round instead of like two good weeks in the summer.

He likes their pool. It’s a strange shape, not rectangular like the ones in movies, but oblong and with a small waterfall that Sapnap particularly likes. He hasn’t spent too much time out there yet, finding it kinda lame to swim by himself, self conscious in the blazing sunlight. With no one to talk to, he’d rather just stay inside and find a VC to join until his friends wake up and he can bother them.

“This is a gorgeous neighborhood,” Mum says, almost under her breath. George swells with pride, like he had something to do with it. They consulted him when choosing their home, but Sapnap and Dream did the leg work. They facetimes him to show the general house—rooms and windows and the garden, but the neighborhood itself never came up except for Dream to mention it was gated.

“We like it so far,” Dream says proudly. The road carries them around a bend and then Dream’s pulling back into the driveway, coming to a stop in the garage next to the Tesla. George hides a yawn as he gets out of the car. Dream slams his door and then heads to the trunk to pull his mum’s suitcase out. George’s eyes land on the bulge in his muscles, the crimson t-shirt sleeves cupping his biceps perfectly.

As quick as he was to look, he’s quicker to look away. His mum catches his yawn. George swings around to escort her in.

“You want to show her the house, George?” Dream asks, popping the handle out and rolling the baggage behind him. It’s dim in the garage once the automatic door closes behind them.

“Oh, I can take that,” his mum says but Dream shakes his head with a big grin on his face.

“Let George show you the house, I’ll put this up in his room.”

“George?” he hears as soon as they walk in the door. Sapnap’s in the kitchen, eyes heavy with sleep, his hair messy in the way that George knows he’ll hide under a hat later today. “Dream? Is that you guys?”

“Yeah, it’s us,” George says, lamely. Dream disappears towards the stairs and George feels very awkward watching his two worlds collide. His mum looks strange here, in this kitchen. She’s too small and the kitchen is too big or something.

“Oh,” Sapnap finally notices George’s mum, eyes telegraphing his panic to George while she

misses it entirely, looking around the house. It's suspiciously clean, now that he thinks about it, like maybe someone with too much nervous energy spent a while fixing everything. "You must be George's mom."

Lending her attention to Sapnap, George introduces them. "Mum, this is Nick. Nick, my mum. Don't say anything weird."

"Me or her?" Sapnap asks, finding himself again. He wouldn't be Sapnap if he wasn't saying something stupid or crazy or both.

George thinks about it for a second, looking between them, "Both of you, actually."

"Now, George, I wouldn't embarrass you, would I?" his mother teases him, humor coloring her cheeks for the first time since she landed in the U.S.

"I would," Sapnap says with brutal honesty. "He probably won't want me to tell you—"

"Shhhh!" George says, not knowing what he's going to say, but knowing it won't be good. Believe it or not, there are things he doesn't want his mother knowing about him. Things that Sapnap absolutely knows, tricked out of him. This is why he doesn't share things, keeps them behind his walls, usually. For situations exactly like this.

"Oh, I think I have some stories, too," his mum comes alive, sharing a laugh with Sapnap against George, "we should exchange stories later, Nick."

"You two can't just—"

Sapnap's evil grin is disgusting, "Absolutely, George's mum."

"You should probably just call me Kate," she says with a wink. George wants to die. Sapnap looks like he's on cloud nine. George is never going to hear the end of this.

This version of his mum is familiar to him, though he hasn't seen her in years. The mum who banters with his friends, gets to know them, wins them over until they all want to come to his house because his mum is so cool and buys all the cool snacks and isn't George just so lucky to have her as a mum?

He was. He is.

As annoying as their exchange is and knowing it will follow him relentlessly, it's nice to see his mother smile. Even if it's at his expense.

"Did you even start the tour, George?" comes Dream's voice upon re-entering the kitchen. He's not even out of breath after hauling that suitcase up the stairs. Some things aren't fair.

"No, he was too busy getting mad about me and Kate being BFFs, bro," Sapnap says.

"They're ganging up on me," George complains and Dream, the traitor, laughs at him too. When he sees he's getting no relief, he says, "Come on, let me show you the house."

Dream walks with him through the tour, largely leaving it to George to point everything out, only interjecting when George forgets something important. They walk through the unused dining room, the formal foyer, the small hallway to Sapnap's room with the laundry nook and linen closet before taking the stairs for the upstairs rooms. Dream's office slash fan room, Dream's room, the hallway bathroom George shares with Sapnap and now Mum. He only doesn't take her in Dream's

room, though he doesn't think Dream would object if he did. George ends the tour at his own room, the last door in the hallway.

"You'll be staying in here," he tells her, flicking the lights on as he walks inside. It's still new to him, still fresh. Sapnap helped him paint the walls blue a week into his arrival here, and Dream ordered a nice desk to house his set up, already put together before George even left London. As far as George knows, he hadn't set foot in the room until this morning.

So many boundaries already broken down by his mother's impromptu visit. It's fine, he tells himself. It's fine.

His friends' marks are on this room as much as George's. He tries to see it through his mother's eyes—it's bigger than his room in her house. Bigger than his room in his flat, which she'd helped him get settled in, much better than the time his dad helped him move into his uni flat.

American houses seem to be bigger in general. Everything, really. Bigger meals, bigger buildings, bigger cars.

"It's nice," she says, laying her purse down on her suitcase. Dream left it at the foot of the bed, still unmade from this morning.

"Here, we should change these sheets." He grabs the duvet and strips the bed, the back of his neck hot under the scrutiny of Dream and his mother. Dream pitches in after a second and takes over the pillows. With a look at George, he reads him and nods.

"I'll grab some clean ones from the linen closet," Dream steals the sheets out of George's hands on his way out the door. He can only send him a grateful look.

Mum takes a deep breath, "I'm really putting you out, huh?"

"No, Mum, I've just never been a host before, you know? Always had someone else to do this part," George says, hand combing through his hair to push it out of his eyes again. The rush of activity making it fall out of place. "We didn't really have time this morning to—"

"Well, I didn't give you much notice," she says, placating.

Before George can transition into asking her why that was, Dream returns with a fresh set of soft pink sheets.

"We use these when my sister stays," he says proudly. "I grabbed you a clean towel, too."

His mum is too exhausted to do much today. They spend a couple hours by the pool, both holding books they read in between conversations. George's is some novel Dream swears he would love and his mum has a romance novel she bought at the airport, tacky sexual cover included. The sun is brutal, even for Florida, and George hides behind a t-shirt and a pair of Sapnap's sunglasses he borrowed and never returned. His mother wears her straw hat and sunglasses he's never seen before. They aren't spending much time reading, the books but a prop for the awkward silences that come up while they spend hours talking. It's more than catching up, and George likes that.

She won't talk about anything important, though, nothing about Dad or Neve, unless directly asked. George, lost in how to traverse this mine-field laden conversation, gives up asking questions and sticks to answering hers or talking about his life here.

In a complete one eighty from two months ago when she watched him board his plane, Mum loves hearing about his life in Florida. It's bizarre to George to go into detail about how his new channel is going, the vlogs he's put together with Sapnap and Dream, their adventures to Gatorland and watching Dream try sushi for the first time. George doesn't count Walmart sushi and neither should anyone else, it's a travesty. He shares his ideas for future vlogs—Dream teaching him to drive, Sapnap teaching him to skateboard.

"Both of those sound dangerous," she says to that, her mouth pulled into a teasing smile.

For once, she's invested in the conversation about his job. He finds himself going more in depth he would with a person asking for politeness' sake, talking about the algorithm and getting into the psychology behind thumbnails and why he chose certain ones, how they effected the click through ratio. Her face is openly curious under the hot Floridian sun, her sunglasses perched on her nose.

He perks up at the sound of the sliding glass door opening, "George, put more sunscreen on," Dream shouts from the house.

"My mother is literally right here, Dream," George shouts back as Dream disappears back into the house, his message delivered.

"He really cares about you, huh?" his mother says, watching the door slide close with a knowing look on her face.

Something unpleasant flips in his stomach. "What?"

The question from his mother short circuits his brain and he needs something to do with his hands. That's the only reason he reaches for the sun cream and starts applying it to his face. He'll never hear the end of it if he manges to burn when Dream told him not to, not that this fact would normally stop him from ignoring Dream entirely. "Oh, yeah, well he's my best friend. And he's like this with everyone."

"Really?" she says, less of a question and more of an I-don't-believe-you statement.

"Mum, he knew you two seconds and was already trying to give you his room," George finishes his face and starts on his legs.

"That has more to do with you, than me," she argues but by the way she turns back to her book, George can tell she's letting it go for him. Not fair for her to pry into his business but remain mute on why she flew across the world on a second's notice.

"Mum," he chances again, hoping he can use the serious tone and segue into what he's so curious to know, "what happened? What's going on?"

"I think I'd like to see Disney," she says, refusing to acknowledge the question like an ostrich burying her head in the sand. George suppresses his disappointment, "Dream did say it would be worth seeing. Would you want to go? Maybe we can invite your friends?"

Okay, he can take the hint. She's a brick wall. "Yeah, I'd like to go." He leans back onto the recliner, letting the sun shine down on him again, safe now from its rays, "Not sure if they'd come, but we can ask."

“I’ll buy you Mickey ears,” she leans over to ruffle his hair. He counts himself lucky she doesn’t remark on the length again, “you’d look so adorable.”

The couch betrayed him, he concludes after sleep eludes him for another night. He doesn’t understand why it’s so hard to fall asleep tonight. He’s fallen asleep here so many times—the warm OU blanket covering him, something playing softly on the TV, the safety of his friends under the same roof. Dream keeps the house arctic, but under this blanket and with these joggers and socks, he should be toasty. He should be comfortably sleeping after a long day and an early morning.

It’s his mum, he knows it is. He can’t make sense of her behavior and his brain keeps circling back to her strange arrival. Why won’t she just tell him why she’s here? She has to know he finds this all weird, he’s said as much, offered her a chance to talk. Why won’t she take it? What secret is she hiding and why?

He flips to his left side, thinking not for the first time tonight that he just needs to change positions, and then he’ll be able to fall asleep. He’s fallen for that line many times. What ends up happening, though, is he just keeps rotisserie chickening until his blanket is twisted and his sleep shirt rides up uncomfortably.

Sapnap offered to let him sleep with him and George had laughed, there’s no way he would want to share with Stinknap, especially not for an entire week. There’s something so intimate about sharing space for that long. That’s why when Dream offered the same thing, a hopefulness in his eyes that he would chose him over Sapnap, George denied it. With Sapnap, he wouldn’t be comfortable with that intimacy, and with Dream he’d be too comfortable.

Where’s Goldilocks when you need her?

He falls further onto his back, eyes wide and taking in the popcorn ceiling. There’s no chance here. He needs a real bed. Dream’s navy bedspread looks really appealing in his mind’s eye—the mattress is the right amount of firm versus softness. He remembers talking to Dream extensively when he was researching which mattress to buy, going over pros and cons. George thought he was ridiculous at the time, still does, but he can’t deny the results. Whatever mattress gods Dream found, he needs to make more sacrifices to them, keep on their good side, not fall out of favor.

The hardest part of leaving Dream’s room is leaving Dream, however, the second hardest thing is leaving that mattress. Not to say the mattress in his own room is awful. It’s not bad, it’s just not the heavenly cloud that Dream owns. And it doesn’t come with Dream in it. That’s always going to be a ‘con’ in his book.

But he can’t slide himself into Dream’s bed, no matter that he was invited, no matter that he probably hurt Dream’s feelings a bit by rejecting the offer. It’s the rule. It’s his one rule, do not cross the line. Do not leave anything in his room, don’t cross the barrier and get comfortable there.

George doesn’t knock on Sapnap’s door, he pushes it open and throws himself onto the unoccupied side. With difficulty, because it’s up against the wall.

“George?” Sapnap startles awake, his face fish-like in the dimness of his room. His hand comes over to George, like he needs to make sure he’s really there. It’s warm in a way that George hasn’t

felt in the hours he's spent dying on the couch alone. He's jealous immediately.

"I'm sleeping in here," George informs him, lack of sleep making him more demanding than usual.

Sapnap stares over at him for a beat and then promptly falls back asleep, his head diving into the pillow so hard it would hurt if not for the goose down.

Sapnap's bed sucks. There, he said it. He'll tell him tomorrow, too. See if he won't. It's too hard, and the blankets are not warm enough. Sapnap keeps hogging them and he's a starfisher. Just as George knocks his leg back onto his own side, it'll come right back up. He's going to have bruises tomorrow.

Now he's staring up at Sapnap's ceiling, and really, they all look the same in the end. Whether they're popcorn style or smooth or arched. Staring at a ceiling is staring at a ceiling. It's not sleeping, that's for sure.

His eyes burn. He just wants to go to sleep. But he's cold and his legs hurt and his mum won't tell him why she's here or what the emergency is and everything is pressing down on him and—

His feet carry him to Dream's room. He's no longer capable of holding himself back, he wants to be warm and safe. Dream will take care of things, he can put himself in his hands. A trickle of apprehension makes its way into his stomach, but his lethargic limbs have too much inertia to stop now.

Dream's holding a pillow to his chest, lying on his side in the middle of the bed, a glow from the street lamp outside illuminating his shirtless body. George lets himself onto the bed, careful not to touch the enticing skin in front of him. Hands shaking, he lifts the covers enough to slide in.

Blessed warmth.

"Hey," Dream whispers, softly enough not to startle him. He discards the chest pillow and turns to face George.

His voice croaks as he asks, "Can I sleep here?" He's already doing it, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

"Of course you can," Dream says, moving over to the left side to give George more room. George burrows deeper into the covers, warm for the first time in ages. "Why are you so cold?" He pulls George into him, wrapping those arms around his torso and George melts into him, leeching up the heat coming off of him.

"Did you have a good day?" Dream whispers over to him. As close as they are together, George catches the words along with Dream's breath on his cheek. It makes him shiver in a different way.

"Yeah," George says and in the silence between them, confesses, "I can't figure out what's going on with Mum, though."

He hums, one arm methodically running up and down George's arm to heat up his skin, goose bumps rising under his fingertips. "She didn't say anything while you guys were alone? I thought maybe she didn't want to get into it in front of me and Sapnap."

"No! I kept asking and she'd just bulldoze over me and change the subject, it's so infuriating."

Dream's chest bobs with his laughter and George freezes. "What's so funny?"

"Sorry, it's just that's classic George behavior. It's funny seeing you on this side of it."

George doesn't care for the comparison, but he can see where Dream's coming from. George doesn't like sharing certain parts of himself and he likes it even less when someone can see through him and ask about those parts. "So what do I do?"

"You give her time," he says simply, looking down at George's lips for a second while he pauses to think, "She's here for a reason, she'll bring it up on her own. You're just spooking her when you keep asking. She needs time to work up to it."

Something fundamental to George's universe clicks into place.

"That's what you do for me," he mumbles. He sees it so clearly now. He laughed yesterday at knowing the way to get to Dream is through praising him. He thought he had such a leg over him, he forgot that Dream's got his number, too. Dream knows how to navigate his feelings, he's considerate and a good observer. George is seen. George is known by him. The warmth stolen under these covers comes to his face and he burns.

"Most of the time, yeah," Dream agrees. George hopes he can't see the flush on his skin in the limited light, "You know yourself, you don't do well when pressed on something. You must get that from your mother."

"So I just, what, ignore it? Ignore all the strange things and wait?"

"Yeah, you have to be patient. It's worth the wait with you NotFounds, I promise."

Dream's voice goes even lower, deeper with lethargy, "You're tired," one hand comes up and touches the eye bags gracing George's face. "Now go to sleep."

"Easy for you to say," George mutters, but to his surprise, he slips easily into sleep.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Kate settles into casa de Dream Team and we learn some stunning truths

Chapter Notes

Okay I couldn't wait, so here's chapter 3. Next chapter will be uploaded 3/18 because that's the chapter that made me really fall in love with writing this fic

Dream's room looks different in the morning. He's never been in here this early, now that he thinks about it. They usually only wind up here in the darkness of night. The morning sunlight highlights the Patches hair stuck to the navy bedspread, evidence she spends more time on the bed than the abandoned cat tower in the corner Dream spent so much money on.

He's alone in the bed, to both his relief and disappointment. Dream's side of the bed is cold and George stifles the embarrassment from actually reaching out to check. Taking a deep breath, he stretches all his limbs out like a cat, the blankets falling off him in one big wave. He's still warm, the smell of Dream covering him enough to almost not miss his presence.

Last night comes back to him and he cringes with his whole body. Two months of avoiding this exact scenario and here he is, waking up in Dream's bed, and looking forward to doing it again tomorrow. How shameless was he to stroll in and demand to sleep here? His only consolation is that technically Dream did offer, earlier in the day. He clings to that while he shakes his head, trying to rid himself of the humiliation.

Loud voices—happy and energetic—come from downstairs, drifting in the open door. He sighs to himself, he needs Dream to start closing doors behind him. An open door is an invitation and this open door is an invitation he hasn't extended. Anyone can just wander in if the door isn't closed.

Eventually, he makes his way downstairs, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. In the kitchen, he's shocked to see the counters covered in baked goods, all kinds—bread, cinnamon rolls, muffins, cookies, way too many things. Did someone rob a bakery? What are they going to do with all this? There's no way Dream's eating any of this.

“George!” greets Sapnap, looking like a child on Christmas.

“Morning,” he says, taking in more of the scene. His mum is leaning against the counter, a mug of coffee hiding most of her face. George didn't think they even had coffee in the house, since none of them drink it. He sniffs, yeah, that's definitely coffee.

“Good morning,” Mum says once she's swallowed her mouthful, “we've been baking.”

The two of them are too awake right now for George's taste. Sapnap is bouncing around like a Labrador and his mum flits around, eager to show him everything they've made.

“We made cinnamon rolls, Gogy, and look,” Sapnap points to the island counter, “Kate let me make the glaze!”

“Weren’t you the one burning eggs live on the internet like two days ago?” He asks because he can’t find an opening against Sapnap and not take it. Sapnap wouldn’t want him to.

His friend rolls his eyes, still sore from the internet’s reaction to his final product, “well maybe I just needed your mom’s touch to learn a thing or two.”

He snorts, “Maybe don’t make your mum jokes when my mum is literally right there.”

“I don’t mind,” she says, not hiding her amusement very well, “I think it’s flattering.”

“See,” Sapnap says, pointing at his mum like George has never seen her before, “she thinks it’s flattering.”

“Oh my God, you two are not allowed to gang up on me and become best friends.”

“I could always use another son,” his mum says, pulling Sapnap into a side hug. Their matching grins are too much for George, but it’s cute to see them getting along. He just wishes it wasn’t at his expense.

“Breakfast?” without waiting for his answer, Sapnap plops one of the cinnamon rolls into the microwave to heat it up for him.

“How long have you two been...” he struggles to find words. The microwave hums to life in the background.

“Jet lag hit me hard,” his mum answers, “I woke up around 4:00 and didn’t know what to do with myself.”

“I was up trying to make myself some food,” Sapnap picks up the story. “Your mom saw me and felt sorry for me. We made muffins in honor of BadBoyHalo and then kinda went off—”

“The deep end?” George tries not to think he’s the reason Sapnap woke up, his bratty behavior fighting him for blankets and real estate in Sapnap’s own bed before giving up the ghost. He reassures himself that Sapnap got plenty of sleep since he went to bed hours before George anyway and with the evidence of his own eyes, George knows he got rest. He wouldn’t apologize anyway.

Sapnap pulls the cinnamon roll out of the microwave at the beep and says, “I meant more like we were popping off.”

“I didn’t know you could ‘pop off’ at baked goods,” George says, coming more alive now that he has food in front of him.

“What does ‘pop off’ mean? Is it a bad thing?” his mother asks dubiously. George and Sapnap share a look and both end up laughing.

“No, no, it’s nothing bad,” George tells her and goes on to explain. His cinnamon roll is perfect, tasting like he’s nine years old again.

George's mum gets her way and they wind up at the mall for the majority of the day. Sapnap drops them off after they've had a cleaning party in the kitchen, George refusing to help since he didn't make the mess, but staying long enough to wake up fully.

Mum leaves a cinnamon roll and a muffin covered on a plate for Dream to eat when he emerges from his cave—the combination room of home gym and office where he gets his gains both physical and electronic. George doesn't tell his mother that Dream likely won't eat them, he's very strict about the healthy shit he puts in his body and he already cheated this week with the pancakes, but he doesn't want to disappoint her.

He takes a quick shower and capitulates quickly to her request to go shopping. She snooped through his wardrobe before leaving the confines of his room when the jet lag woke her up early, and she's not impressed with his hot weather wardrobe.

"You have one pair of shorts," she admonishes, "how are you going to go outside with only one pair of shorts? You're going to get heat stroke."

Sapnap doesn't hide his glee, jumping in on his mother's side without reservation. George really needs to nip this alliance in the bud. "Yeah, George, you probably need some new shirts, too. Better swim trunks for sure. Maybe a tank, show off those guns. This is America, baby."

His mother's eyes widen and she's nodding, to George's disappointment. "Yes, new shirts and shorts! Maybe a nice outfit in case you go somewhere you need to dress up. Do you have a nice outfit?"

He groans, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Why would you encourage her, Sapnap?"

"What? I just want my baby boy to look pretty for me," he says and George groans again, louder. He hates his friends.

"Maybe I'll just move back to London," he mumbles and Sapnap punches him in the arm. "Or Antarctica."

The saddest part is that he enjoys his time with his mum at the mall. Sure, she tortures him for a couple hours shopping for clothes, visceral flashbacks to shopping when he was a teenager coming to him in a not very good way—there were a lot of strained silences and passive aggressive clothing choices back then. George only wanted to wear Supreme, clothing comfortable and trendy enough. His mother, he felt like, wanted to dress him up like a doll. It felt infantilizing at the time, but now with a fresh perspective, he thinks maybe it was her way of trying to connect with him. On her own terms. She couldn't meet him in the technology, but fashion was her world and she wanted to share it with him.

And he basically spat in her face.

He has this revelation in the fitting room at Brooks Brothers where she makes sure he owns a suit he won't embarrass himself in. "Because what if you have to go to an awards show, honey? You're famous now, you never know. Wouldn't you rather do this while I'm here to help?"

"Sure, Mum," he says dutifully, and then texts Dream to ask which one he likes better, the navy or the charcoal. He's only walking out of here with one over priced suit, no matter how much his mum argues with him. It's his money. She tries to pay and he almost slaps her hand away, card proffered.

"My treat," she insists, the cashier swiveling between mother and son.

“No way, I’m paying,” he argues with her, pushing his card towards the cashier. “I can probably write this off, since I’m using it for work. Just makes more sense.”

She doesn’t agree but doesn’t fight him on it. As the same pattern repeats at the next four stores, his appreciation for a new wardrobe grows. They haven’t gone shopping together like this since he was that moody teen. It’s nice having an in-person hype lady. Well, Dream’s a hype person too via Snapchat. He has opinions on everything. It makes George wonder how much music stuff he’s actually getting done if he’s responding this quickly to everything George sends to him.

In between telling stories about Sapnap’s adventures to win over the skateboarding coterie in Orlando and the exhilarating tale of meeting Dream’s family for the first time, George realizes that Mum’s controlling the conversation and keeping it about here. Florida. She won’t bring up anything in England, not his dad, or her life there, she’s deliberately avoiding those subjects. Again.

He did watch her slip a purse for Neve into their purchases, but nothing for Dad and no mention of him. Warning bells go off in his gut. He wants to demand answers from her, ask what happened and not leave until she tells him, but Dream’s words hold him back. Dream’s advice never fails him. He’ll trust him on this one. She’ll bring it up when she’s ready.

George lets his mum treat them to lunch in the food court, since he paid for everything else. And then when they decide to extend their day and catch a movie in the attached cinema, he lets her pay for the popcorn, but not the tickets. He can’t remember the last movie he saw with his mum. Thinking about it during the pre-movie adverts, he doesn’t know if they’ve ever seen a movie together, just the two of them. Maybe when he was really young, but he doesn’t remember.

He shoves a handful of overly salty popcorn into his mouth, the grease sticking to his hands. He looks over at her in the dark and spots the smallest of smiles on her face, like she can’t help it. He returns the gesture.

After the movie, Sapnap is stuck streaming with Karl and can’t leave to come pick them up. George offers to order an uber, but his mum says they should grab dinner together instead and wait for Sapnap to finish up. “We have all these bags, anyway,” she points out and George agrees, even though the long hours are starting to get to him.

“Dream says Applebees is basic,” George says while they try to figure out which restaurant to choose.

“Well, I’ll take his word for it,” she sounds like she’s placating him, like he’s still that little boy she took so seriously, and he doesn’t understand what she’s humoring him about. He only gave a Florida native’s insight?

They don’t go to Applebees, but his steak is still dry.

Disney is fucking loud at 10:00 in the morning. It’s not just the children running around, it’s the birds, and the background music, drilling a hole cruelly into his head. Walking next to his mother, he slowly gets used to it. She keeps up an excited stream of chatter and George responds when

prompted, happier to listen than participate. At least until he wakes up a bit more.

He slept well the night before. Waking up again with no Dream in the bed but seeing evidence he slept there, he's trying not to take it personally. Dream's always had a strange relationship to sleep and George shouldn't expect that to change just because he wants Dream's arms around him. Honestly, it's probably better he's not there so George can't get used to it.

"What do you want to ride first?" his mum asks, nudging his elbow with hers and pulling him out of his head.

It's a school day, so it's not too busy. He read through a reddit post last night in bed, hoping to catch Dream before sleep overtook him, and thinks they should hit the biggest rides with the longest lines as early as possible. "Pirates of the Caribbean?" Not quite the biggest, baddest ride, but George is excited about it, doesn't want to miss it.

They make their way over to the ride, pointing out cool looking shops to each other and only getting side tracked into shopping through one or two—a modern miracle with his mum. He's having flashbacks to yesterday at the mall. She doesn't buy much, preferring to browse, touch everything like she's cataloging it for later. She walks away with a set of Mickey ears, as promised, and a sweatshirt for Neve.

"You're going to have to carry that all day now," he says, looking at the map and trying to figure out the best way to get over to the ride from here, "should have bought it on the way out."

She shrugs, "I saw it and knew she would like it. I can carry it around forever if I need to."

One of his favorite things about Disney is the set design for the rides, including the queues. He makes his mum take a picture of him in front of some of the pirates and sends it to Dream, who immediately likes it and sends back pictures of Patches standing on the counter. They've been trying to get proof for ages that she does it, and George smiles to himself to see Dream caught her red handed. Or red pawed?

"What are you smiling about?" Mum asks.

"Nothing," he says, locking his phone and putting it in the pocket of his new shorts, "I sent that picture to Dream because he's been liking a lot of pirate fan art recently—" a weird thing to explain to your mother, what a strange job he has— "and he let me know he finally caught Patches on the counter."

Her eyes are soft, "he should have just come with us."

George hums in agreement, keeping close to the family in front of them in the queue.

After the pirates ride, they make their way around the park jumping in line of anything that looks fun but won't induce motion sickness. George doesn't like roller coasters and even though his mum does, she's fine with avoiding them. He buys them lunch and overpriced ice cream later, and they enjoy watching the characters move around the park, kids walking up for pictures or crying in terror when pushy parents try to force an interaction. Mum regales him with the tale from his own toddlerhood when an over-enthusiastic Easter Bunny hopped a little too close to him and traumatized him. It's a story he hasn't ever heard before, making him eager for what else he's missed of his own life. He thinks how strange it is that it's his life, but there are always going to be parts his mother knows better than him.

With the face masks, he's only recognized twice and asks the fans nicely to post the pictures later,

with him posing in his Mickey ears and feeling ridiculous. They ask him about Dream and Sapnap and he informs them that he's there alone, avoiding their obvious curiosity. There are things the fans can't have and one of those things is his family. Not without their consent. He won't drag anyone into this lifestyle if they don't want it, if they aren't equipped for it, he's seen what it can do to people.

Once the fans walk away, his mother joins him again with something close to pride in her eyes. "My son is so famous," she teases him and he brushes her off with a laugh of his own. Whatever stress she's been under lifts temporarily and he watches her shine under the hot sun, living in the moment here with him. He loves it. By the time they call it quits, his cheeks hurt from smiling all day.

The electronic dance music their uber driver plays doesn't do enough to keep George awake. His eyes are heavy in his head. The sun touched him on his nose and cheeks and he knows he'll catch hell from Dream, but it's worth it for the happiness of the day. His mum is quiet beside him, as tired or more so than him, still battling the jet lag.

He looks over at her and the dying sunlight halos her blond hair. She's beautiful. But she's more than that. If there's anything he hopes he's gotten from her, it's her kindness, her gentleness, the ability to listen attentively and remember things about people.

This is what they've been missing for years. He can try to pin it on her, no longer interested in his hobbies or the video game backdrop he used to make friends, but he never asked her about herself. He took and took and took and after never receiving anything, she finally stopped.

And broke his heart.

Maybe this is what it means to be an adult, to learn that there are things your parents need from you and that it's up to you to provide it. And not things like grandchildren, but the acceptance that a relationship with your parents is just like any other relationship: if you want it to be successful, you have to meet them halfway.

"Mum," he says into the air between them, hoping she hears him over the bump bump bump of the music, "what do you like to do for fun?"

She lets out a small gasp and her head turns to look out the window. He doesn't understand why his question would elicit this response. It's a pretty straightforward question. "Mum?"

He reaches a hand over, concerned, to put it on her shoulder. She trembles under the touch. Quickly, she turns back around and wipes at her face, brushing away more than tears—straightening her mask. His hand slips off her shoulder, and he doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know how to handle this.

"You okay, Mum?"

"Yeah, baby, I'm okay," her eyes are still overly bright, "I can't remember the last time someone asked me that."

Now he feels terrible. What kind of son is he? He doesn't know basic things about his mum—he

couldn't tell you her favorite color or if her favorite flower changed from irises or where she likes to go shopping or what her favorite food is. He knows she likes reading, but that's only because he's seen her reading that romance book since she's been here.

"Oh, um, I'm sorry," is all he can manage to say. There's a lump in his throat and no amount of coughing will clear it.

"No, it's good. I'm sorry, I'm all—" she waves her hand around, gesturing to her face, "it's just been rough for me recently."

Her hand lands on the seat between them and he takes a risk and grabs it. He likes when Dream holds his hand to reassure him, hopefully that translates here. Sometimes he feels like he's only guessing at emotions, like he's buried his own so deep that he mimics the emotions of those around him to fit in because using his own is too scary, too vulnerable.

As always, his baseline is Dream. If Dream was upset in front of him, he'd grab his hand to make him feel better. She squeezes him in gratitude, a small smile cropping up.

"I'm sorry you're going through a rough time," he tells her honestly. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She takes a deep breath and he counts four measures from the song playing before she's ready to answer. It's like watching a game of bedwars play out in front of him, he has no idea which side is going to win. Is he like this too? Is getting him to talk as difficult as it is to get answers out of his mum?

His gut says yes and for the first time, he's not proud of it.

"Your father and I had a fight," she finally says.

George doesn't let himself react. His instincts tell him if he reacts badly she'll shut down again. He needs to be mature, a rock, an ally for her in this. He doesn't think she's had someone on her side in a very long time.

"I'm sorry to hear that. What happened?"

"Oh, you don't want to hear about an old woman's troubles," she says, pieces of the mask solidifying again. He wants to bat it away entirely, but he has to be careful.

"I do," he says firmly. "I want to hear all about it. Tell me."

She looks unsure, contemplative. He stares back her, trying to keep his face open.

The dance music abruptly shuts off, and when George looks out at their surroundings, he's surprised to see the front gate of the neighborhood. Shit, this is the worst timing.

The driver gestures up at the gate, his English isn't very good, and George cannot for the life of him understand what he's saying, so he makes an executive decision that they can walk the rest of the way. He gets out of the car and says, "We'll walk from here, thank you so much, sir," and then proceeds to tip him an extra twenty dollars because he still doesn't understand tipping in America and he doesn't want the driver to think he was rude or anything.

The entire interaction lost him this conversation, he can tell by the set of his mother's shoulders. She pulls her purse closer to her and says, "Ready?"

They've walked miles upon miles today through the park, but what's another half mile?

Dream is in the kitchen when they walk through the garage door, stretched collar on his white shirt and black sweat pants that ride low. George throws his mum's bags down right inside the door. They're heavy. That's the last time he acts gentlemanly and offers to carry anything for anyone else. They can pick them up later. Right now, he needs a glass of water.

"Oh, hey," Dream greets them, his lopsided smile making George melt more than the weather outside.

"Hi, Dream," Mum says back, frowning at the bags but not moving to pick them up either. The strangeness from the uber is long gone, along with any chance of George discovering more about this fight.

"How was Disney?" Dream asks like he doesn't know, like George didn't spend the entire day texting him, bothering him about the song, asking for details and giving his unsolicited opinions.

Throwing himself into a barstool at the island, George groans. It's been a long two days and he's done more exercising than he has in ages. Dream, taking pity on him, opens the fridge and hands him and his mum a bottle of water each, ever the gracious host.

"Thank you, sweetheart," his mum says and George grunts in agreement. "Wish you could have come with us."

"This song isn't going to finish itself, unfortunately. And I only have the producer's time for a small window," he says. It's probably the truth, or a version of the truth. George can tell that Dream is allowing them time to themselves. He probably talked to Sapnap too and made him agree to give them space.

"You've probably been a hundred times or more," Mum swats the air with her hand. George takes a large gulp of his water, letting the coolness soothe his throat.

"It's always a new experience when you go with people you care about," Dream says nonchalantly, like he isn't dropping bombs that make laser alarm sounds go off in George's head like PEW PEW PEWPEWPEWPEWPEWPEW, eerily similar to the GOXLR sound he's so fond of.

"You guys hungry?"

"Starving," George says, lunch many hours behind them now.

"I was about to make some pasta, that okay with you guys?"

"That sounds amazing," George is already thinking of Dream's pasta, he makes different versions, but George hasn't had a bad one yet. Turning to Mum, he tells her, "Dream's good in the kitchen. You won't get like food poisoning or anything."

"Wow," Dream laughs, opening cabinets to get out the pans to start the pasta, his shirt pulling up just enough to show a thin line of tan skin above his pants. George's mouth goes dry and he takes

another big gulp of his water, “such high praise. ‘Won’t actively kill you,’ he says.”

The stool beside him scrapes the floor when his mother pulls it back to sit down, “Darling, after Nick, you can see how I might be worried about that, right? I like that boy, but he’s a disaster in the kitchen.”

“Amen,” Dream mutters. “Well, I don’t have any Michelin stars, but I don’t have any bad Yelp reviews either.”

“Not for lack of trying,” George can’t help himself, he has to give his friends shit. It’s what he was put on this earth to do.

“Shut up, idiot. You love when I cook for you.”

“Prove it.”

“I don’t have to feed you,” Dream says, mouth coming up slowly to show he’s teasing, “Kate and I can have a lovely meal together and you can just starve.”

“No, Dream, that’s not fair.”

“Admit I’m a good cook, then,” Dream demands.

“I already did, idiot.”

“Say more than I won’t give her food poisoning. Tell Kate how you beg me to make you food everyday.”

“I’m not saying that,” George would rather die, “it’s not true.” It is.

“Then you’re not getting fed tonight.”

“Fine,” George says combatively, but they both know Dream is still going to feed him, still going to watch his face when he takes the first bite and make sure he’s telling the truth when he says how good it is, still going to ask what vegetables he should add to cater to George’s tastes.

“Fine,” Dream agrees, his voice so achingly familiar in this tone. So many playful arguments ending this same way over the years, false agreement but zero hard feelings, only the thrill of the fight. So many other friends, witness to these ‘fights,’ left wondering what just happened, why both their moods are only happier after they tear into each other like this, until they learn from others or by themselves, that this is Dream and George’s favorite way to play together, a language they speak fluently and taught to Sapnap. Every other means of communication their second, and worse, language.

They grin broadly at each other until Dream looks down at George’s chapped lips, snaps out of it, and continues preparing dinner.

His mum sets her empty water bottle down on the island and with a sinking feeling in his stomach, he wonders what that looked like to her. Will she be baptized by fire like everyone else? He’s never worried about what it looks like to outsiders, but it’s weird to do this dance in front of his mum. Almost like he’s showing her something private, like he should be ashamed he forgot she was in the room and played with Dream that way. Too late now, he thinks.

When Dream sets the water to boil, he surprises George. His finger comes across the island and touches the bridge of George’s nose. “Got a little sun today, did you?”

“Fuck off,” George laughs, his skin buzzing between the burn and Dream’s touch.

“So what rides did you go on? Tell me everything,” Dream asks, pivoting the conversation back to their day. “Did you meet any fans?”

“Oh, yes,” Mum says, eager to jump into the conversation. “The girls went wild for my Georgie.”

Dream’s wheeze laugh fills up the whole kitchen.

After dinner, Dream joins Foolish’s stream, another blatant maneuver to give him more time with his mum. Sapnap’s out at Punz’ apartment, a trip he does at least once a week. He’s the member of the Dream Team who needs to get out of his enclosure the most, needs more enrichment than Dream and George who get most of theirs from each other.

George sees a missing tin of cookies and presumes he took some to Punz, probably going to erroneously brag about how good of a baker he is. George can imagine the entire conversation in front of him. Punz won’t let Sapnap get away with shit and that’s George’s favorite thing about him. Those kind of people are important.

“I’m exhausted,” George says, though he’s not ready to go to sleep yet. He doesn’t want to fall into Dream’s bed again, wondering if or when Dream’s going to show up. He doesn’t need that insecurity.

“Me too,” his mum says, but she sounds as reluctant to leave his presence as he is. They’ve had such a wonderful day, he doesn’t want it to end yet.

Rejuvenated with food, George says, “Walking around the park all day makes me want to watch Lion King. Do you remember how many times I watched that when I was little?”

“Over and over and over again,” she says, a nostalgic smile brightening her tired eyes, “you were so cute but that movie got so old after a while.”

“Want to watch it?” he asks, feeling shy.

She looks him head on and he thinks they’re on the same page. “Yeah, honey. That sounds perfect.”

George gets the movie set up pretty quickly under Sapnap’s Disney plus log in and he turns off the lights in the kitchen and the lamp on the end table—open plan making the kitchen lights cast a horrible glare on the TV if they aren’t handled. Dream won’t let him re-arrange the television, just enough to reposition it to keep that from happening. Dream’s an idiot for keeping it here. Apparently he likes to be able to see the TV from the kitchen, something about stupid American football and not missing anything.

He offers to share his OU blanket with his mum, and she takes him up on it. They sing the opening song together, just like they always did when he was a kid, taking their best guesses at the Swahili words. His mum would usually start the movie with him and then find other things to do as it wore

on. He gets it now, a chance to get laundry done or cook dinner or the million other things parents have to do around their children's attention spans. Still, it's nice to watch through Mufasa's death with her next to him.

He doesn't cry. He doesn't. Sure, he's forgotten how traumatic that part is, but he definitely doesn't cry.

"Really, George? You've seen this movie how many times and it still gets to you?" his mum asks, teasing him. Her fingers curl over to him to tickle his sides, the only place that gets that reaction. Unfair.

"It's sad!" he squirms out of her grip and they laugh together.

"I love how deeply you feel things," she says seriously after their laughter subsides.

Not knowing what to say, he finds her hand and squeezes it briefly. He doesn't like how he feels things—like an ocean of tumultuous water constantly churning, ready to capsize him, pull him under and drown him. Always seconds from death.

"Dream loves this movie too," he says, trying to change the subject away from the discomfort in his gut. "When he annoys me I tell him he's acting like Zazu. He gets so mad and tries to argue he's Simba, but like a smarter version. As if that even makes any sense at all. Sarnap's Pumba, obviously."

He laughs at his own joke, barely noticing when his mum doesn't. They watch a few more moments and then she says, conversationally, "I didn't realize how special he is to you."

A knot grows in George's stomach and he freezes. What does she mean?

"I don't mean," she continues, speaking in fits and starts, "I just mean—I didn't realize before I came here how much Dream means to you. I should have. It's obvious, in retrospect. You tried to tell me so many times and in so many different ways, I—I want you to know you can share whatever you want about me to him. I don't mind. It should be that way."

"What are you...?"

"You don't have to keep anything of mine from him. I know his opinion matters to you, so you're welcome to discuss anything with him. Don't feel like you're betraying my confidence or anything."

"Mum..."

"And I know he cares about you too. It's obvious how much he cares, I—" she swallows, "I'm so happy you have people that love you this much. You are so lucky to have this, honey. Do you know that?"

"Yeah," he croaks out, throat dry. He's always known how special Dream is, how special their friendship is. Almost from the first time he truly spoke with him and they just clicked. That's why he works so hard to keep himself in check, keep it protected even from himself. Especially from himself. "Yeah, Mum, I know."

"Those boys love you. I get it now. I get why you needed to move to America. Your family is here."

"You're my family, too," he protests.

“I know that, I know. But the thing about growing up is that you can make a new family. Sometimes that looks like a wife and husband and eventually kids. Sometimes it looks like three friends and their cat who share a house and share careers and... and support each other. That’s not less valid. I think people my age... well, I think we lived in a different time. We were pushed into our new families before we were ready.”

“Mum, what does that mean?” The knot growing in his stomach hardens further.

“Nothing, nothing, I—I just want you to know that I’m sorry I wasn’t supportive when you talked about moving here. Or, or when you got into streaming and I—I didn’t get it. I didn’t understand and that’s on me, as your mother. I stopped asking you—”

“I never asked you either, Mum. I never asked about your hobbies. We always did what I wanted to do, and that wasn’t fair.”

“You were the kid, George. That’s how it should be.”

“Okay, but I’m not a kid now, and I haven’t been for a while. So, I’m asking about you. You deserve to have people ask about you, too. You don’t have to be the one giving all the time. It’s okay to take, too.” Talk about déjà vu, he’s definitely had a version of this conversation with Dream before.

“Agree to disagree,” she compromises and George doesn’t agree but all he can do from here is change his behavior anyway.

“I just—Dream is wonderful, honey. He’s kind and sweet and so supportive of you. I like that he takes care of you, in his own way.”

He’s not sure where she’s going with this.

“And Nick, too. He likes to give you shit, but he cares about you deeply. We had a great talk when we were baking the other morning. I think he would be embarrassed of how lovely he talked about you when you weren’t there, how much he looks up to you.”

His emotions are stretched, overwrought. He needs to get out of this conversation. She’s headed into territory he isn’t sure he can stomach. “They’re okay I guess.”

“Don’t do that,” she says sharply. “Not with me. I can read you, George, and I know you don’t like to admit how much people mean to you, how deeply you love, but those boys don’t deserve that. They deserve to know that you love them just as much.”

“They know, Mum,” he says, a little small.

“Do you know how lucky you are to be known? Truly known and loved by your friends? I—George, I—” her eyes are streaming now and he doesn’t know what to do. She’s stiff and she looks like if he touches her she’ll shatter, “I don’t have any anyone like that, George.”

His mouth gapes and he wants to cry too, now. He can’t look at his mother weeping and not want to pull out all the bad feelings she has and stomp on them. He wants her to be happy. She should always be happy.

“Mum,” he says, it’s all he can say. He grasps her hand again, links their fingers together and he holds her tight. “Mum, what did you and Dad fight about?” For the first time since that phone call, he’s not sure he wants to know.

She's quiet at first and with his heart in his throat, he starts to think she won't answer, that she'll change the subject again, hide away from it. But something about the raw honesty in the air, or the intimacy of spending the entire day together, the privacy of the semi-dark room, she sighs deeply. "He said he's not sure he wants to stay married to me."

George's world implodes.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Dream deals with two NotFounds

Chapter Notes

Some Dream POV. And this chapter is a day early, but I couldn't wait any longer.

Fun fact: This is the chapter that made me obsessed with writing this fic
Feel free to come talk to me on twitter or tumblr - Scoops404

The bed reflects Dream's mental state when he walks into his room after a long day spent working on music, days worth of a normal recording artist's schedule condensed into hours in a call online, too many opinions, too many disagreements, the vision too lost in the shuffle.

George didn't bother to make Dream's bed this morning when he got up. Maturely, Dream chooses not to acknowledge that if anyone else left his bed a mess like this he'd be annoyed. But it's hard to be annoyed when his pillows still smell like the strawberry body wash George brought from England and he can still feel the specter of George pressed against him.

God, he doesn't know what possessed George to slip into his bed the other night when he was so adamant that he wouldn't, that he'd make do on the couch, but he both loves and hates it in equal measure. He adores the soft breaths on his neck, the way George gets as close as possible to steal his warmth—it's not stealing if Dream gives it up freely. The danger is in the ease in which Dream gets comfortable with George in his bed, sleeps faster, sleeps deeper, more restful. He can't find a believable excuse to kidnap his best friend and force him to spend the night with him just so Dream can sleep better, just because Dream wants him there.

He's terrified George would do it without the kidnapping. He's terrified he wouldn't.

So he'll ignore it.

Music from the Lion King drifts up into his room from George's movie time with Kate. He hopes they're still sitting how he left them on his journey from office to bedroom, cozy under the OU blanket with big grins on their faces and mouthing the lyrics to "I Just Can't Wait to Be King."

In bed now, the blankets fixed as perfectly as he can get them, knowing Hurricane George is going to blow them off course as soon as he hits land, his pillow catches his head. He scrolls through twitter for a while, watching the fans fall apart when he likes fanart. It's one of his favorite things to do. He sees evidence of George's fan encounters from earlier in the day, his little mouse ears crooked and the smile in his eyes making him seem much younger than he really is. It's cute.

A noise at the door startles him. He looks up.

It's George.

He's off—he looks paler than normal, his shoulders around his ears, a black cloud hangs over his head. Dream's spine straightens, immediately on alert.

“What's wrong?” he asks, ready to jump at a word from him, call someone, tweet something, use any of his resources to keep this look off George's face.

George holds up a hand. He closes the door behind him too gently, like if he doesn't control himself he'll slam it. Then he runs to the bed, and throws himself onto it, head first like a little kid.

“George?” Dream says softly, worry only increasing when he doesn't move. He's not going to smother himself, is he? George's shoulders shake and Dream doesn't know how to react.

“She finally told me what's going on,” George says and Dream has to strain to hear him. “She and my dad might get a divorce.”

“Oh, George,” Dream springs into action, knowing that George won't ask, he would rather die than ask, but he needs a hug. Dream's arms work themselves around the smaller body and George melts into him, turning into his embrace, his nose digging into Dream's neck.

This isn't something they do.

They hugged at the front door when George first got here, an anxiety ridden hour late because Sapnap took the long way.

But they aren't huggy friends. Not because Dream doesn't want to be, he has to hold himself back every day to keep from touching George anytime they're close. He's trying so hard to respect George's boundaries, even if they're unspoken.

So many times over their long friendship, he's wanted to hug George, imagined them doing so all the time. Part of him even believed that when George finally moved in, Dream would be able to hug him every day. But he's not about to push himself where he's not wanted. George's body language closes off when Dream gets too close. He's not dumb and he's not unobservant, especially with George who he's been studying for years, learning intently. He tries not to take offense that George doesn't seem bothered by Sapnap's wandering arms, that it appears to just be Dream's touch he can't stand, doesn't think about it all the time, doesn't lose sleep because of it.

“Did she say why?” Dream prompts him after a couple minutes. George's head comes to rest on his chest and if he kept quiet longer, then he'd start thinking about how wonderful it feels, how he wants them to do this all the time. There's no sense in going down that road.

He can feel George speak since they're chest to chest, “she said he kinda blindsided her.”

“Like he said it out of the blue? She had no idea?”

“I guess. We didn't get into the nitty gritty details there.”

Dream wants to ask a thousand more questions, but settles for, “What did you talk about? What did your dad say?”

“She didn't say much about the actual fight,” George tells him, “more the repercussions, I guess. They didn't make a decision. They both needed time to think about it.”

“Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

“They’ve been married a long time.”

“Yeah,” Dream says again, mind going a million miles an hour, “Do you—Are you like totally shocked?”

George lifts his head to say, “What the fuck? Of course I am, Dream! They’re my parents, they’ve been together forever.”

“I didn’t mean—” Dream says, rubbing George’s back to show he’s doesn’t mean anything bad by it, “Just—like, were there any signs that you picked up on? Like, looking back?”

George puts his head back down and is quiet for a long time, not the peaceful kind. He’s violent with it, but not at Dream. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised,” he finally says and Dream feels like he can breathe again. He does so, maybe too heavily. “I’ve never thought they were like particularly happy, you know?”

“What do you mean?” Dream says because his parents are the gross kind of in love where they make jokes about going to have a quickie and his dad likes to playfully slap his mom’s butt in front of all the kids to gross them out. At the end of the day, though, he’ll catch them holding hands in front of the television, or sitting on their front porch swing at sunset and talking about what they want to do in their retirement.

George shrugs and Dream feels the movement and deduces what he’s thinking. He tries to simplify it for George, used to helping him discover his feelings about things, “What do they like to do together?”

“What do you mean?” George asks this time, an ugly echo of Dream’s own words.

“Like, are they friends? Do they go to movies or plays or whatever you cultured British people do?” Dream lets his fingers trail along George’s back, not hard enough to tickle, to show he’s teasing, “Museums, I bet British people do museums.”

“You idiot,” George says, “I never went to museums.”

“Yeah, but you’re American. Just born in the wrong body,” Dream says, half serious. “So you don’t count.”

George ignores him but Dream catches a glimpse of amusement and counts it as a W. “I don’t remember them doing anything together. I guess when I was little they’d watch like adult programs together, after me and Neve had to go to bed. It used to make me so mad.”

“Always hated being left out, huh?”

“Shut up,” George says, pinching Dream’s side and making him laugh. “Idiot.”

“I just—doesn’t that seem weird to you?” Dream asks, hoping George will understand. “They’re married and they don’t do anything together?”

“I really can’t remember anything. Dad had like his work friends he’d see sometimes and then he’d work on his car, but Mum never did that with him.” He heaves a deep world weary sigh and Dream lets it sit in the comfort of his bed. He lets George think back, imagines standing in a house in Brighton he can no longer picture, only ever saw George’s bedroom anyway. He tries to imagine George’s dad, using the features of George that he doesn’t recognize in Kate and puts together a Frankenstein’s monster portrait of his dad.

“No, I don’t think they ever really spent a whole lot of time together,” George eventually says, “I mean, they slept in the same room, but that doesn’t mean they talked. I mean, talked like this—about things that matter.”

“Huh,” Dream says, “we’re not married, but I can spend all day with you and still want more time, you know?”

“Dream,” George says and he can’t place the tone. George buries his nose further into Dream’s chest.

“I don’t get sick of you. If you got into working on cars, I’d want to know what attracted you to that. I might not like it enough to do it with you all the time, but if you see something in it, then there’s something good there, you know?”

“Yeah, I get it,” George says. “Like Crab Game.”

“Hey,” Dream squeezes George tightly and it makes a small giggle come out, “you liked Crab Game.”

“Not as much as you.”

He doubts anybody liked it as much as him, even the creators. But Dream recognizes that George gets it. Gets what he’s saying and reciprocates. Dream doesn’t question their friendship. He knows he’s important to George, arguably more important than anyone else, can get him to drop a call with less than a word, always George’s first pick as a team mate even in the games he sucks at, moved to fucking Florida to live with him before they even met in person. Still, it’s nice to have his value acknowledged in as thin of terms as George lays out.

“You liked it enough to play with me.”

“I did that for the fans,” George argues and Dream rolls his eyes. This man won’t even stream for his fans, so he knows that excuse is bullshit. Cute.

“Do you see where I’m going with this, though? Like, maybe it’s healthier for both of them in the long run if they actually aren’t happy together. Of course, I don’t like know them or how they are or anything, I’m just saying.”

“I know you are, Dream. It helps, I think,” George says, drawing nonsensical patterns on Dream’s chest through his shirt. It tickles, but it’s nice. “There was a time when I was a kid and like three of my friends’ parents split up, right in a row. I used to be so scared that my parents would too, you know? In that kid way that feels like it’s the end of the world. But then, no, they stayed together and I never thought they were like over the moon happy, I’ll admit. But it’s not something I thought about often, you know? They’re my parents. They’ve been together my whole life. Of course they’re together, I’ve never known it any other way.

“Now I feel bad because I’m like, how long have they been unhappy? I asked my mom what she likes to do for fun because, Dream, I honestly don’t know. And she cried because no one ever asks her that. What kind of son am I?”

“Hey,” Dream says, pulling George back into him, “you’re not a bad son, that’s ridiculous. Your mom is going through a hard time and I think it’s sweet you asked her. It shows you care. If you were a bad son, you still wouldn’t ask.”

“I’ve been...I think I’ve been mad at her,” George says and it’s so quiet that Dream wonders if he’s even supposed to hear it. It feels delicate, brittle, and Dream cradles the confession between

his ribs. “Maybe I’ve been punishing her, I don’t know.”

“About what?”

“For pulling away,” George tells him, “for not caring about coding and uni and, well, you.”

Dream takes a deep breath and George’s too long hair absorbs the brunt of his exhale. He really needs to get it cut.

“Now I think it’s a deeper issue,” he continues, “I think she’s depressed. And I feel bad for feeling... angry.”

“You can feel any way, George. Just because you have empathy for what she’s going through doesn’t make what you went through less important, what you’re still going through. You can feel both.”

“Yeah,” George says, and he sounds exhausted. It’s been a long day for him, Dream realizes, Disney all day on little sleep and then a conversation as heavy as the one with his mom... it’ll take it out of anybody.

“Is she going to be mad you’re talking to me about this? Like, do I need to pretend I don’t—”

“No, actually, she said I can share anything with you. Which is good because I was going to anyway,” he adds with a small smile. “No need to tip toe around anything.”

Dream lets that sit for a moment, focusing on the feeling of George in his bed, safe. If he could take George’s pain, emotional or physical, he would in less than a heartbeat.

“Any idea what you’re going to do?”

“I think,” George says and Dream knows this is so much more difficult for him than other people—that he handles emotions so alien-like sometimes, foreign enough from Dream that he has to translate things. It’s no less valid, it’s just different. It makes him react differently than other people, but Dream has all the patience in the world for George and enough experience to know to let him have room to breathe. “I think I need space from her.”

“That’s okay, I think she’ll understand that.”

“I don’t want to waste our time together. Who knows when she’ll be able to come back to visit.”

“You can always visit her too, you know. Or fly her out. Don’t get too in your head. You deserve space if you need it, time to think on all this. She’s had more time to wrap her head around it, I doubt she’ll begrudge you an afternoon to think over what she told you.”

“Yeah,” George agrees.

“Let me know how I can help, George, I mean it. Anything you need, you let me know.”

“Yeah because I’m so reserved with you.”

“You can be with like emotional stuff. Even if it’s just a cuddle, let me know. I’m your guy.”

“Go to sleep, idiot,” George says, but Dream hears the silent *thank you* behind it.

Dream wakes up late the next day—the rare night in his impossible to predict sleep schedule where he sleeps longer than most humans, completely dead to the world. George is long gone from the other side of the bed. He spares a brief thought hoping he wasn't too cringe when George woke up. If he stuck to the pattern of the past couple of days, Dream was probably wrapped around him possessively.

He supposes it was too much to hope that George would never know that Dream's been using him like a stuffed animal in his sleep.

He can tell George isn't in the house. There's a presence, a vibe, in the house when George is there that feels like those twenty hour calls they spent together, sometimes muted and deafened, but still connected. Maybe he and Kate went somewhere, maybe she'll confide more in him, talk through her feelings about all this.

Making the bed feels good to Dream, satisfies the part of him that needs order.

The television plays quietly when he walks into the kitchen. Blearily, he grabs a glass of water and downs it in one go. With a glance over to the screen, he sees some reality show playing. Unusual in this house.

He makes an educated guess and calls, "Kate?" and walks into the room to confirm his suspicions. Although, it would very funny if Sapnap developed a taste for reality television, he might die laughing too hard. There's no documented proof it can't happen.

"Good morning, Dream," Kate says, robotically, taking her eyes off the screen long enough to take him in. The spark she shares with George isn't present here. That worries him.

He sits beside her on the couch, bemused to note she took George's normal spot without realizing it. He helps himself to the OU blanket, inexplicably feeling guilty for taking George's property when the damn thing clearly belongs to him.

"What're we watching?" he asks when he can't figure it out a few minutes later. His reality TV knowledge is admittedly sparse.

"Oh, you can change it if you want," she hands the remote over to him.

He shrugs and refuses to take it. "I don't care, I'm happy to watch whatever."

He doesn't like the guilty look on her face, the way he can tell she's deciding if she should push or let it go so he adds, "I have a call in like forty minutes, but that's not enough time to start anything and really allow myself to sink my teeth into it, and not short enough to just like play around on Twitter. I'm happy to watch with you, if that's okay."

"He told you, didn't he?"

"He did," Dream says, calmly. She deflates, sinking further into the couch cushions. Dream isn't sure if he should feel bad about knowing, should he have lied? He doesn't like lying if he can avoid it and something like this—the way George made it sound, she almost encouraged him to tell Dream. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Her eyes are hesitant, closed off. He can certainly understand that. She just met him, just decided to give him a chance. And he's young, way younger, younger than her own son even. What wisdom could he shed on the situation? It was stupid to ask, he shouldn't have—

“Actually,” she says, surprising him. “That might be nice.”

Her smile reminds him so much of George, for all that they don’t look alike.

“Well then,” he says, standing up, “I think we should go get milkshakes and talk.”

“Don’t you have a work call? I can’t ask you to—”

“I can re-schedule it, no problem.” It’s just Tommy. Tommy can chill and they can talk about Youtube algorithms later. “It’ll keep.”

She stands then and in the dim light of the living room, he realizes how little she is. Even smaller than George. Her personality makes her seem larger, another thing she shares with her son. Something she passed onto her son, perhaps. A wide smile, kind eyes, and an internal magnet that draws people to them.

“If you’re sure.”

“I am,” he says, grabbing his car keys from the table by the door to the garage. “Don’t tell Sapnap I’m having a milkshake, though.”

“Your secret is safe with me,” she says, chuffed. “Let me just grab my purse.”

The run down diner isn’t busy at this time of day. Dream is counting on that. It’s a secret spot he’s been keeping even from Sapnap and George, a place he shares with only his mom. It feels appropriate to now share this spot with George’s mom. There’s nothing wrong with the place, he saw the A+ health inspector rating on the door as they walked in, but the vinyl booths are cracked in long wedges and the linoleum floor feels more old than purposefully retro. Whatever, he likes the vibe and they have the best milkshakes.

“I haven’t had a milkshake in ten years,” Kate tells him as they help themselves to a booth. The two of them drove over in companionable silence, unspoken agreement to wait until they’re at the diner to get into it. Dream played soft music in the car, dreamy sounding and sincere. Sapnap would never let him live it down.

“It’s been a while for me, too,” he says, smiling over at her. It should feel stranger than it is, sitting here with George’s mom. He twists his mind and can’t come up with an interaction between just the two of them over the last few days. Instead, he feels at peace in her presence, the kind that took years of friendship with George to accomplish—like they just skipped ahead to the part where they’re important to each other.

Dream makes small talk with the middle aged waitress while Kate looks over the long list of milkshake options, a bit overwhelmed. Dream orders the same thing he’s been ordering since he was eight. Some things never change.

“Whatever you tell me is safe with me,” he says, thinking that maybe she needs to hear that. He’ll do it, too. Dream learned from Bad how to be a supportive friend, how to listen intently, how important it is knowing your secrets are safe with someone. In his line of work, secrets are more precious than gems. He’s kept secrets safe before, and he’ll gladly do it for Kate to ease the burden

she's carrying.

"You don't need to hide anything from George," she assures him, "I'm not going to get in between you two. That's the last thing I want."

"If you're comfortable with that," he watches their waitress hand their orders over to the cook in the back.

"It's just hard to say this stuff to your son, you know?"

He feels a smile paint across his face, "I can only guess."

She teasingly rolls her eyes and Dream is reminded again of George.

"It would be strange to hear about my parents' marital struggles, yeah, so I can see it from that side."

"George loves his dad and I'm not trying to put him in the middle of this, like this is some Hollywood movie where he has to choose a side and shun the other one or whatever," she says, taking a sip of her water. "And it was only a fight! I mean, it's not set in stone one way or the other..."

"Start at the beginning," Dream says because he needs context and they have all afternoon. This is a twenty-four hour diner and he's self-employed. They can stay all night if they need to.

"Define 'the beginning.'"

"How did you meet George's dad?" he asks, sipping his own water now.

Her eyes widen, "oh the very beginning, then."

"I think it'll help," he explains. "I've never seen you and your husband together, I have no—no..."

"It might be better that you haven't," she says. "I'm sorry I'm dumping all this on you, Dream. I can't believe I—well, this must be so strange."

"I'm happy to listen, Kate. I'm happy to help. Sometimes it's easier to tell someone you barely know, who barely knows the situation than it is to tell people you really love, you know? I get it."

"Yeah, but you aren't exactly some stranger, either. You're my son's best friend and now that I've been here, met you, and seen you two interact, I know that you're going to be around forever."

Dream's heart warms and yeah he might have to fight back the tears welling in his eyes. He's a simple man, he loves to hear that he's important, loves to know that the people he loves and fights for do the same for him, loves knowing he's permanent in an impermanent world. He looks upward to keep the tears from falling, embarrassed to be seen this way when they've barely gotten into anything.

A warm hand snakes across the table and grabs his. "Has he not told you that?"

"No, no, he—you know George, he doesn't exactly—"

"He's not great with words," she finishes for him, sure. "He's not great at verbalizing his emotions. He's always been that way."

"It can be like pulling teeth," Dreams commiserates. For the longest time he wasn't sure he was

important to George. He wouldn't say anything, wouldn't call him his friend, wouldn't admit Dream meant anything more to him than the university acquaintances he mentioned in passing. It took forever for Dream to realize that even if George didn't say it, he felt it. He spent hours in calls, playing Minecraft together, asking each other about coding, bantering and play fighting, and Dream wasn't sure George cared about him until Sapnap asked why George would bother doing all that with someone he merely tolerated? That woke Dream up.

"It's not that he doesn't feel," she says, preaching to the choir, "I know you know that, you must at this point. But his real problem is that he feels so deeply. Almost too deeply. He can't come up with words for how much he feels all the time."

"And he thinks it makes him weak to even try. Or, like..." Dream struggles to put it into words, ironic given the subject matter, "like the words he comes up with aren't enough, like he's not doing it justice."

"Yeah," Kate says. "And he sure as fuck didn't get that from me or his father. I have no idea where that came from."

This squeezes a laugh out of Dream, the curse unexpected but delightful. "I don't know," he tells her slyly, "I can see some similarities there."

She takes mock offense, her hand flying to her heart and a gasp falling from her prim lips. It makes him chuckle.

"I had to tell him to stop pestering you about why you came here," he admits. "That you're like him in that regard, if you push too hard he clams up. Every time."

Kate looks pensive for a moment. "How funny."

Dream catches the waitress' eyes from across the room, accidentally. She brings over a water pitcher and re-fills their cups while Kate sits thinking. Dream thanks her and she says their milkshakes will be right out. He says thank you again and starts to wonder how often he's actually supposed to say it. This is why he needs to get out of the house more often.

"I did think it was funny when he stopped bringing it up. I thought maybe he grew up a bit. Now I see he just had you to explain it to him, that I wasn't ready to talk about it yet."

"Sometimes I think me and George make one whole person," he says without thinking. That really is a thought he's had multiple times, how easily they complement each other. How his strengths are George's weaknesses and vice versa. How they jive so easily, covering for each other but without being boring. It's not a thought he meant to share with George's mom, the inherent romanticism of it too intimate, too personal, even for her. Maybe especially for her.

He feels his face burn and takes another healthy sip of his water, hoping the ice water will take the sting out of his wound.

"You're sweet, Dream," she says, taking pity on him.

"Enough about George," Dream says, thinking he'll never get enough of George, he could talk about him for hours, he enjoys hearing his mom's perspective on him, another person who knows him intimately but from a different angle, he could go on and on and on about George— "Tell me how you met his dad."

"We were in university," she says easily, like it's a story she's told a thousand times. And maybe it is. "We knew of each other, had some mutual friends. They set us up and we hit it off."

He lets her talk, something telling him to hold himself back. There's something there, something deeper they need to find.

"And you liked each other?" he asks when it becomes clear he needs to dig a bit.

"Yes, obviously," she says.

"What did you like about him?" Dream asks and he feels like this is a fair question. He can name all the things he first liked about all his exes, all his past crushes, even things he liked initially about his closest friends. You don't fall into a thirty year relationship without liking something about the other person, right?

"He was respectful," she says, "we liked to take walks together. He lived in off campus housing and he would let me study in his flat when my dorm mates were too loud."

"How was the sex?" he asks, feeling daring and dangerous. Part of him wants to see if he can throw her off balance, pick at her mettle.

If she's thrown, she doesn't show it. There's George in her again, rising up to a challenge and refusing to lose. "It was okay at first," she says, "and then it was good."

"Not great?"

Here she wavers and Dream gives her a second. "I'm not sure I've ever had great sex," she eventually admits.

"That sucks," he says because as much as his last relationship pains him, the sex was excellent.

She shrugs, "I feel like sometimes in relationships you sacrifice one thing for another. Back then, and even now, I'd rather have a reliable partner who I can have a conversation with than life altering sex."

Dream can't help but scoff, "spoken like someone who hasn't had life altering sex."

"Have you?"

"Life altering?" he asks and she nods, curiosity in her eyes. "No, but truly excellent, yes."

"God, you're so lucky," she says wistfully.

"I get it though, if I were ready to settle down forever, I'd choose someone reliable too over just great sex. I'd prefer both, though."

He'd choose someone who could make him laugh, even on his bad days. He'd choose someone who chooses him, who makes him feel special and loved and—

"Smart boy," she says. "You're young, though. And a hot commodity."

"I'm telling your son you called me hot," he says with a laugh.

"I'm telling him you asked about his parent's sex life," she throws back at him and he concedes with another, brighter, laugh.

He holds his hands up in surrender and lets her have the pleased look on her face. She earned it.

"So, you got along okay and then what?"

“We stayed together all through university, all our friends got along, it was great. Eventually my best friend dated his best friend, and, I dunno, it was easy.”

“Maybe too easy?” Dream asks, leading.

Kate shrugs and her face closes off a bit, not dissimilar to George again. He has walls upon walls, almost like a canal—interwoven locks that need to be navigated carefully or one can close unexpectedly.

The waitress drops their milkshakes off with a sweet smile, chatting again for a second, maybe angling for a good tip. Dream’s easy, he’s a twenty percent minimum tipper, even before he made all his Youtube money. Now he’s like a hundred percent tipper, easy to do when he never goes anywhere or does anything.

It’s enough of a distraction to give Kate a couple seconds to think, to retract her walls. Dream hopes one day George will get to this point, where he can sense Dream’s good intentions and drop his walls again on his own, instead of the intricate dance Dream has to do to catch him off guard again enough to lower them. It’s a dance he’ll happily do forever, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t take it out of him.

“Maybe it was too easy,” she concedes after a long pull from her strawberry milkshake. “We graduated, got jobs in our fields, and then got married.”

He sips his own milkshake, the thickness just the right consistency. His teeth protest the frozen milk.

“I think I wanted to be a mother more than I wanted to be a wife,” she says a second later and—
“Fuck.”

“We got pregnant right away. We had the money, promising starts to our careers. It’s easy to have kids when you’re a teacher, well no, actually it’s never easy, but it’s easier than in the corporate world,” she says.

“I liked my life. We lived close to all our friends, we had game nights, we went dancing once a month, and then once they started having kids, we had play dates. It was nice.”

Dream tries to imagine George as a toddler, the oldest of all the other babies and he bets that even then George fit in with those younger than him. He’s never cared much about age, as happy to hang out with Tommy as he is with Philza. It’s not about age with George, it’s about energy levels.

He bets he was a cute kid, all eyes and mouth. He’ll have to ask Kate for pictures later.

“It sounds nice,” he tells her sincerely.

“And then we had to move to Brighton. Jim got a job there, a big promotion.”

George talks about Brighton with fondness, it’s where he really grew up. Where he felt like he became cognizant of the world, as far as Dream understands. He gets it. He liked Oklahoma, has fond memories, but he considers himself a Florida guy. Florida Man or whatever, but it’s true. He grew up here, became the adult version of himself here, and there’s something to be said about that, how a place can forge you.

Dream knows that your childhood can skew things, though.

“What happened in Brighton?” Dream asks when Kate doesn’t continue. She takes another deep sip from her milkshake and he watches her hand fly up to her temple.

“Absolutely nothing,” she says and confuses Dream.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, nothing happened. I didn’t need to work anymore, so I didn’t get a new job when we moved. George and Neve were old enough to go to school, at thirteen and ten so they started making friends. Jim made friends with a couple of his co-workers and he’d go get beers down at the pub with them after work once every couple weeks or so.”

“And you didn’t.”

“I didn’t. I didn’t make any friends. At first Jim and I made an effort, went out for dinner and left the kids at home, but that slowly petered out. George had tennis and Neve had football and then slowly I had nothing.”

Dream finds her hand again and takes hold of it. He wants to go back in time and be her friend. His heart aches for her. He’s been there, too, feeling like there’s no one, like you’re all alone and you want to scream or cry or do anything.

“That’s tough, Kate. I’m sorry.”

A tear appears on her face and he’s got to stop comparing her to George, but fuck them for being able to cry and not look terrible doing it. She cries with grace and pride and Dream holds her hand tighter. “I’m just kind of realizing this as we speak, Dream. I mean, a little of it only occurred to me in the last few days or so, but... how did I not recognize it? I was so isolated and... and it was my fault. I did it to myself. I threw myself into my kids, I made them everything.”

“George adores you. He talks so fondly of growing up with you as his mom.”

She wipes a tear and smiles her thanks to him. “I wanted more kids, you know.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Jim didn’t though. Not that he didn’t love George and Neve, he did—he does!”

“I didn’t think he didn’t,” Dream assures her because George has never given any indication his dad doesn’t love him, just that they don’t have much in common.

“Maybe he knew before I did I was using my kids to live vicariously,” she takes another sip. “But that’s giving him a lot of credit to notice things.”

“If he had noticed that, he should have talked with you about it. Pointed it out.”

“That’s not his style,” she says with a wave of her hand, quick to defend her husband when he might not deserve it.

“That’s just being in a relationship,” Dream argues, “not even a romantic one. Your friends should point stuff like that out to you, that’s what someone who has your best interest at heart does. They want you to be the best version of yourself just like you should want to be the best version of yourself for them.”

She sits on that for a while and Dream’s pretty proud of that one, retroactively. He wasn’t trying to

be wise when he said it, it's just truly how he thinks about things. That's what Sapnap and George and Bad do for him, even Tommy occasionally. His fans, at this point. He's learned more in the last two years from his fans than most people learn in a lifetime. He'll stand by that.

"I've been in a rut for a very long time," Kate concludes, scraping the bottom of her milkshake.

He's as kind as he can be when he says, "Yeah, it sounds like it."

"So what do I do?" she asks, not necessarily to Dream. It's almost a plea to the universe, an opening gambit to start brainstorming. Brainstorming is one of Dream's strengths.

"Well, it sounds to me like there are several moving parts, here. You need to tackle all of them."

"Go on," she says, "expound on that."

"Number one, you need to figure yourself out. That's the hard part," he knows this to be true, there's nothing harder than learning yourself, coming to terms with the hand you're dealt, learning how to make yourself happy and live with it. "Therapy works wonders. You should give it a go, talk to someone qualified."

Kate opens her mouth and then abruptly closes it, like she had to physically cut off a thought. "My first reaction is very against the idea," she admits, "but that probably tells me it's the right idea."

"Good," Dream tells her, proudly.

"What else, what other parts?"

"Two," he raises his hand with two fingers raised, like she needs the visual. "Once you figure yourself out, you figure out if you and Jim want to stay together. Maybe he doesn't want to wait around for you to find yourself, and that's—that's hard to think about, I'm sure..."

She nods and motions for him to keep going, which he does, hoping that this makes sense to her like it's making sense to him, "maybe at the end of finding yourself, you realize that you two don't match up together."

"And maybe we never did," she says.

"Don't count him out before you both have a chance to try," Dream says, terrified he's talking his friend's mom into divorcing his dad in one conversation. He doesn't need this responsibility. "Talk about it with a qualified professional. You are more than a relationship, too, you know. Find something that makes you happy. A hobby, or get back into the classroom, to learn or teach or whatever makes you happy. Whatever is going to make you wake up in the morning excited to tackle that thing."

"Like you and Youtube?"

"Yeah, I love my job. It's hard and stressful and it's not as glamorous as people like to think, but it's fulfilling to me."

"So basically you're saying don't do anything rash," she smiles over at him.

"I'm saying think things through, do it right. But choose what's right for you in the long run, not Jim, not George and Neve, not what you *should* do, but what's right for you."

They sit in the silence for a while. Dream lets her take her time, think about everything they're

going over. He has nothing but time. The waitress comes over to check on them, see if they want to order food. Dream orders a salad, trying to balance out the milkshake and knowing he won't be able to. Kate does the same thing and they share a look.

"Thank you for this, Dream," she says a couple minutes later. She gestures with her head to indicate the whole diner and Dream takes her meaning. "Talking it out feels really good. I've been going around and around in my head for days, and I just—it's better. I feel settled in a way I haven't in a long time."

"Good," Dream says and he means it. "I'm happy to talk anytime. Even when you go back to England, you can always call me."

"I'll definitely be keeping in touch. Especially with George, I—"

Dream takes a sip of his water. He didn't finish his milkshake and he knows he won't at this point. His stomach is going to protest it sooner or later.

"What's one more thing to unload on you, I guess," she says, "I'm mad at myself for how I've treated George."

"What do you mean?"

"I let him think I don't care about what he does. Or his interests. I let him think I wasn't proud of everything he's accomplished or that I'm not thrilled he's found such a loving family in you and Nick, and that's not true. He's so passionate about this career! I love that for him. I'm envious of that."

Dream melts, "He's going to love hearing that from you."

Their waitress approaches with their salads. Dream unrolls his utensils, puts his napkin in his lap to pretend like he's not a heathen, and digs in. The dressing is too sweet and the tomatoes are a bit old tasting, but the grilled chicken on top is excellent.

They both busy themselves with their salads, Kate using her fork to inspect the leaves of romaine and finding it acceptable. After a few bites, she puts her fork down.

"I feel like I'm waking up from a too long nap," like there hasn't been a break in the conversation. Dream's obsessed with it, "I have a lot of conversations ahead of me. Starting with apologizing to my children. I need to get to know them all over again. As adults."

"You've already made a good start with George," Dream points out. She's making progress already and George is receptive. Very receptive. He's a secret mama's boy, like super low key. Dream thinks it's only going to get worse from here.

"It's Neve who'll be the problem," she says, affection clear in her voice. "If you think George is prickly..."

"I've got George's number," Dream says, hitting the side of his nose. She giggles easily with him.

"You certainly know him. You know, I told him how lucky he is to be known by you and Nick."

"I bet he took that well."

"He said he knows."

Dream needs a moment and hides behind his salad. He takes another large bite, making sure to get some chicken on it so he has an excuse to chew for a while. Kate lets him have his space, watching him as he chews. He dabs his mouth with the napkin and finally finds his voice. “Not as lucky as me.”

“You three are very lucky to have each other,” she says again, “I would kill to have friends like the two my son found in you and Nick.”

“You’ll have those friends,” he says confidently, “in the meantime, you can have me and Nick, too.”

“That’s sweet,” she laughs at him.

“I need to figure out what to do about Jim,” she says, “in the short term, I mean.”

“You’re welcome to stay here as long as you want,” he offers.

“And God, like financially I can’t just—”

“Don’t worry financially,” Dream says easily, “I can help with that. No problem.”

“Fuck, Dream, no. I can’t take your money.”

“I think you’ll find that you can. I’ll help you find a flat or something. Or I’ll talk George into it. It’s not like he spends his millions of dollars when he’s busy spending mine.”

“Oh my God, I’ve raised a gold digger,” she giggles into her water glass. They both find a catharsis in it after such a heavy topic for so long.

“A shameless one.”

“You don’t seem to mind,” she says.

“It feels like *our* money more than just my money,” Dream explains, grateful to have the opportunity, because he can tell this is a tense subject for her. He’s not sure if it’s cultural or just a their family thing, but Dream views money a lot differently than Kate, “George was there every step of the way. He made the thumbnails, he coded a lot of our first projects. I wouldn’t have gotten where I am without him. I’m happy to let him spend the money we made together.”

“And you’ll do the same for me? Just like that?” she asks, but he can tell she’s starting to understand, that he truly means it, “I didn’t earn this money.”

“I would have done it just because you’re George’s mom. But now you’re my friend, too. You’re stuck with me. We’ve bonded too much.”

“Shit. I shouldn’t have told you about all the mediocre sex I had.”

“Yeah, that was the line,” he says sarcastically.

An idea comes to Dream then. A weird idea, born from the same place that the Manhunt series emerged from. He could ignore it, he has a million ideas a day, his little ADHD brain going a thousand miles a minutes when he’s in the right mood—but something tells him there’s gold in them there hills.

“Hey, Kate,” he says, leading.

“Yeah, sweetheart,” the term of endearment lights him up.

“Do you want to be in a video with me?”

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Laser tag and dancing in the kitchen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Explaining how they ended up playing Laser Tag to, well, everybody is more complex than Dream thought it would be.

As best as he can remember, he and Kate enjoyed the rest of their salads, settling into an easier conversation, lighter topics—favorite memories of George, Dream’s childhood, his plans for everything. Kate has a way of pulling truth out of anyone she talks to, the genuine nature of her questions make her conversation partners open up. The more you talk, the more she wants to know.

Dream loves it. He tells her anything she wants to know and it’s nice to have a new audience, someone he doesn’t have to hold back with. He can tell her anything and not worry about it ending up on the internet. For someone as transparent as Dream, eager to talk about himself and things that interest him, she’s the perfect foil.

Still, he asks about her interests and doesn’t let her change the subject until she answers. She doesn’t always know, the decade long rut scarring her in ways that will unfold for a long time. He’s enjoying himself, getting to know her.

It’s a shock to both of them, when he pays their bill with his card, a hundred in cash for tip, and hears himself say, “Want to go play laser tag?”

He used to love laser tag. They just talked about it at length, laughing over stories about his friends long gone from his world, the stupid things boys get into—how Dream learned to love strategy from laser tag, learned to analyze opponents and figure out the best way to win, how to inspire others to follow him and lead them to victory.

He hasn’t thought about his laser tag days in years.

“Yeah,” she says, as surprised at her own answer as she is at his question.

It’s not far from the diner. In fact, his mother used to drop him off at laser tag and then after a couple hours, take him to this exact diner for lunch after he’d burned some of his restless energy off. Probably what made him think about laser tag in the first place.

They jump in the car, an easiness between them that makes Dream happy, proud. He earned this tether. Kate fiddles with the radio and Dream considers it another sign of their growing closeness, she hasn’t dared touch anything she considers “his” until now, not that he noticed until this second. The ride home from the airport, George handled the music. On the way here, he handled the music. She was uncomfortable at the idea of staying in his room, putting him out. He likes that she’s found her welcome with him.

Ah, teenagers. A gaggle of them stand around the outside of the building, more run down than he remembers, but still serviceable. He hopes they don't recognize him. How can he explain he's here to play laser tag with an older woman, let alone George's mom. He finds Kate's gaze and she sees the humor here too. They're feeling ridiculous, but that's what's making this fun.

"Shall we?" he asks, offering his arm to escort her inside the '80's style brick monstrosity like he's some kind of Victorian hero.

She pretends to faint and when they're both dying laughing, takes his arm and walks inside with him.

Dream forgot entirely how to play, all the strategies he meticulously planned, even where to grip the gun. Kate never knew how to play in the first place, and they are both getting their asses kicked by a group of ten year olds. He wouldn't have it any other way.

Kate's in pretty good shape for her age, but she has no aim and even less subtlety. Dream can't stop giggling, everything she does is hilarious, like watching a slow motion car wreck, but a funny version where no one gets hurt.

The ten year olds are vicious, showing absolutely no mercy. They take this game seriously and Dream can hear them arguing amongst themselves about how to play, the rules, and the little boy that lives in him aches for the friends he had at ten years old, who played this exact game with him.

He's not going to do anything stupid like look them up on Facebook and invite them into his life again—he learned the hard way not to trust the people he knew as children are still the same people at their core. And especially not to put them in the spotlight. But, he can still miss the friends as they were at ten years old, before life beat the innocence out of them.

He catches Kate's sympathetic eyes, she's having her own version of nostalgia. Once again, Dream imagines George at ten years old, can imagine him dicking around like this with his own ten year old friends and Dream wishes he could have known him then. The age difference would have been more obvious. It's funny to think of George as being the cool, older, friend. Even when George was in college, Dream didn't think much on their different ages.

At one point, George was probably bigger than Dream. That seems so foreign now. He would have towered over Dream, known more words, more about the world. Dream thinks they would have been friends, regardless.

Kate convinces him to give up the ghost and they don't pay for another game. The laser tag did the trick, he hasn't laughed this hard in a long time. Looking over at her, Dream doesn't think Kate has laughed like this in even longer.

"Excuse me, mister," comes from one of the precocious ten year olds. Dream recognizes him as the leader of their little clique. He looks over at this little guy and he reminds him so much of himself at that age, always the leader, always the one to go speak to strangers.

"Yeah?" he says, unable to keep the affection out of his voice.

This kid looks over at him scrutinizing, like he's under a microscope and Dream admires the sheer audacity this kid has. He loves it. "My friend thinks you're Dream. Are you?"

Straight to the point. A swoop shoots through his stomach and he grins. This is what he was missing all those months cooped up in his house, putting faces to the numbers he sees in his

analytics, making the human connection with his fans. Meeting kids who love his Minecraft content like he loved Minecraft creators growing up.

“Uh,” he looks over at Kate who motions him encouragingly. “Yeah, I am. Your friend has a good ear.”

The little dude’s eyes light up and he turns to his friends, all watching the interaction from a safe distance away, curiosity burning openly on their little faces. He motions over to them with his whole arm, “It’s him!”

They cheer, they actually cheer, and Dream might simply pass away in sheer delight. Seven ten year olds run over to him, surrounding him and asking him question after question. He answers as many as he can, indulgently, probably more thrilled than them at this interaction.

Only two of them have camera phones, but Dream dutifully takes a picture with each one of them. He records a voice memo for proof for when they go back to their friends at school to say they met Dream. His face is still relatively new on the internet, but his voice is memed to hell and back.

He’s walking on air. Eventually, the little ones drift away until it’s just the original kid, the bravest. “Who’s that woman with you?” Kids have no filters and Dream looks at where he’s pointing, already knowing it’ll be Kate on the end of his pointer finger.

They didn’t come up with a plan on how to answer that question. No one really talked to her at Disney with George, but it won’t take the super sleuths on the internet who will look at these innocent pictures from these kids and tear them to pieces looking for clues to place her at both locations. Better to go with the truth, or some version of it.

“That nice lady over there?” he nods his head over at Kate who sees he’s talking about her and waves kindly.

“Yeah, who is she? Is that your mom?”

“Not my mom,” he says, and then whispers, putting a conspiratorial spin on his next words, “can you keep a secret?”

It doesn’t matter if he can, Dream will tell him anyway. The kid nods exaggeratedly, like a cartoon character. “Yes, yes, I can, I can, Mr. Dream!”

“Okay, I believe you,” he says with a laugh, “then I’ll tell you that’s a very special lady. That’s George’s mom. She’s visiting from England.”

His eyes grow big, blue and excited, “George’s mom? Really?”

“Yeah. George is streaming with Quackity right now,” which is true, he got the notification while they were at the diner, “so I promised I’d show her around Orlando so she’s not lonely while he works.”

“You guys aren’t very good at laser tag,” he says, like he needed to share a secret, too. It makes Dream laugh again. He likes this kid.

“Yeah, I know. I used to be very good at laser tag,” he tells him, “I played all the time in this exact spot.”

With that, the kid’s brain melts. He thanks Dream again for taking pictures and then runs over to his friends to tell them that Dream used to play here too, just like them.

He watches him run off and sends a silent plea out to whatever deity might be listening to watch out for this kid, he's going places.

"Ready to go, Mr. Big Shot?" Kate asks as she comes back over.

"Yeah, I think I got it out of my system."

Back in the car, Dream sets his mental GPS to take them back home. His mind wanders over their day while he mechanically drives them around the mess of Orlando traffic—the revelations from Kate, the laser tag, the reality television.

She's quiet next to him, playing with her phone, cursing under her breath when she can't beat a level of Candy Crush. It's such a mom thing to play.

"You like video games?" Dream asks, something George said coming back to him.

She doesn't look up from her screen, but says, "Yeah, I really liked them when they were new. I don't know anything about these war games, killing people, that sort of thing's not fun for me."

Dream doesn't care for first person shooter games, either. He tolerates Fortnite occasionally just to spend time with George and Sappnap.

"What do you like?"

"Mysteries," she locks her phone, giving up entirely on the game and investing in the conversation, "strategy games, things like that. I'm not very good at the hand eye coordination part—"

"That's not what George says," he cuts in. "He says you used to beat the hard levels for him."

She shakes her head, "I guess. He rarely needed my help."

Now he knows that's not true. "He's too impatient to not have needed your help. He can beat games, he just never wants to wait."

Kate huffs out a laugh, "Yeah, that sounds about right."

"Have you played any other games?" Dream asks, and then the answer to what type of video he could do with Kate comes to him, like a prophetic vision. He can see the entire series in front of him, almost visualize the thumbnails. He can feel the tweets he'll do to promote it, already thinking of other guests he can ask to come on...

"Actually, wait, don't answer that yet. I think, yeah, I think this could be a cool video. Interviewing you about your experience with video games. Are you okay with that? Is that like okay?"

It's not like him to be insecure about video ideas. He's the idea guy behind the entire Dream Team, he churns out video ideas and then assigns who's channel it would work best on. But this one isn't tested. It's not a mod or another hunter added to his Manhunt series.

“That sounds like a cool idea. Do you do stuff like that on your channel a lot?” she asks and Dream marvels that she doesn’t know. He doesn’t take offense, he knows she hadn’t gone through all their videos. Probably not even George’s. He’ll make sure that changes.

“Not even a little bit, this will be a new direction for me. And you’ll be the first person to experience it with me.”

“You don’t talk to people in your videos? What do you do?”

“I mean I talk to Nick and George,” he shrugs as best as he can while driving, “you’ll have to find out.”

They continue on in silence again, comfortable and excitement palpable. Dream’s mind whirls with ideas for the video—he debates filming in real life versus in Minecraft, the pros and cons adding up on both sides. Right when he’s deciding on Minecraft, but with face cam, Kate speaks.

“Hey, can we go to the grocery store?”

“Sure,” Dream says, making a last second turn into the Publix without much thought. The car behind him might not be happy with him, but fuck, he put his blinker on and everything.

“Thanks,” she says, “I want to make dinner for you boys. Show my thanks for hosting me.”

“You don’t need to thank us for that.”

“Just let my mother heart do this for you lads, Dream,” she argues and he concedes, looking forward to having an edible meal that he doesn’t have to cook himself or beg off his own mother.

He stays in the car, his social interaction with fans quota past full for the day. Kate doesn’t take long, she’s knocking on the window ten minutes and three songs later.

“What are you making?” he asks, curious about the contents of the paper bags.

“You’ll see.”

By the time they get home, it’s late afternoon. George is still streaming in his room, shouts of indignation alerting them to the fact right away. Kate gives up on the prospect of taking a shower since all her things are in George’s room, and they retire back into the kitchen.

“It’s my turn to pick the music,” she says as she sets up shop, pulling pans out from under the counter, getting re-acquainted with their kitchen.

“Sure, but don’t pick anything dumb or I’ll have to make fun of you forever. Those are the rules.”

“It’s called classic rock for a reason, Dream,” she says mischievously, “hard to fuck it up.”

“Here,” Dream hands over his phone, unlocked, with Spotify already open, “the bluetooth speaker is connected to my phone. Go ahead and find something.”

He doesn’t tell her that his activity is public right now, that Twitter will see every song she picks

and dissect it. Mostly he finds great amusement in this idea, that his fans will go crazy wondering what's gotten Dream in this mood—playing Elton John, the Beatles, the Who, and the Sex Pistols—Kate has eclectic taste.

She sings along while she cooks and Dream sits at the island and keeps her company. They've moved off of the heavy topics, instead, inspired by the thoughts at the laser tag place, Dream asks about George as a kid.

Kate doesn't hold back, she starts with pregnancy and goes through him at the airport in London, ready to fly over to two random Americans he's never met and emigrate. Dream listens intently, it's interesting to see the other side of George, the son, the Englishman, a blank canvas to be cared for, taught language, watch him discover his interests.

"Fuck, do I want children now?" Dream asks half jokingly as she talks about how much she's adored raising George. Kate swats at him and they both laugh.

"Dude, you're having kids?" Dream spins around to see Sapnap emerging from his room off the hallway behind the kitchen. "I call godfather."

"You'll have to fight George," Dream says.

Sapnap yawns and then smiles at Kate, excited to see the evidence of a meal almost ready to consume. "Something tells me it won't be much of a fight."

Dream shakes his head, unsure what that means and unwilling to admit it. "Were you napping?"

"Nah, just fucking around with George and Quackity on his stream until they got boring," he throws himself into the bar stool next to Dream at the island.

"We didn't get boring, you idiot," and now George enters the kitchen, hackles already up. Dream finds him so adorable in his oversized sweater, too long hair stuck up like he had it pushed back by his headphones again. All the childhood stories Kate told him rattle around his brain and Dream can't help but look at him and think how glad he is that this person is in front of him. "Quackity had to go, I dunno, drive to school or wherever he's always driving. He's so obsessed with it."

"It drives you crazy he won't tell you," Sapnap says, clearly pleased with himself. "You can't stand not knowing things."

"Vouch," Dream says just to annoy George.

"Shut up, idiot."

"Missed you, too," Dream blows him a kiss to further annoy him, "How was big Q?"

"Also an idiot," George says and walks to the fridge to get a glass of water, pivoting around his mother with a shy smile. "Hey Mum."

"Hi, honey."

"What'd you do all day?" he settles for a bottled water, Dream's mom preference and the only reason they keep them in the house.

Kate's still cooking, but the oven can only work so fast and there's nothing for her to busy herself with. Dream almost jumps in, but she says, "Dream took me out for lunch and then we played laser tag."

George drops the bottle of water.

“You did what?” Sapnap says, incredulously.

“Mum, what?” George asks, fumbling to pick up the water and cutting his eyes over to Dream to see if he backs up the story.

“Yeah, it’s true, we went and got salads,” Dream meets Kate’s gaze and they laugh at their shared secret, “and then got our asses kicked by a group of ten year olds at laser tag.”

George’s shock is tangible, Dream can almost reach out and touch it. He looks quickly between Dream and Kate like he can’t get the equation to work, like there’s a variable he’s missing or is hidden from him.

“We were bored,” Dream says and then takes pity on George and lets him know without words that he’ll explain later. All it takes is a look.

The message is received, George’s eyes soften in acceptance at Dream’s promise and he’s satisfied. They’ll talk and Dream will lay everything out, keep nothing truly hidden from him. Dream’s secrets are George’s secrets.

“What’s for dinner, Kate?” Sapnap asks before Dream’s ready to be done with this moment. The words shake him out of George’s gaze and he turns to take in the whole kitchen.

“A traditional Sunday roast,” she says, proudly.

“You haven’t made that in years,” George says, carefully.

“It’s my favorite,” she explains and Dream gets it, gets what she’s doing and George probably does too. “And you liked it as a kid, as picky as you were.”

“Will I like it?” Sapnap asks and Dream elbows him.

“Duh, you’ll eat anything.”

“Do you remember when we made this together when you were a little boy?” Kate asks George, ignoring Sapnap altogether.

George nods, sweater paws bringing the water bottle up to his mouth for a drink. He takes a long pull and Dream bets all the money in his bank account that he’s trying to figure out what to say, to compose himself.

Kate takes the nod and checks the remaining time on the oven, they have twenty minutes, “Do you remember what else we did while we cooked?”

“Mum, no,” George complains, but he’s smiling and Dream takes a leaf out of his book and hates being excluded.

“What?” Dream looks between them, the teasing glint in Kate’s eyes meeting the amused but reluctant look on George’s face.

Kate picks up Dream’s phone off the counter, enters his passcode which he gave up pretty quickly, and navigates Spotify until a specific song starts playing out of the speakers, unrecognizable to Dream. She cranks the volume up.

“No, Mum, I’m not—”

“George,” she says mock sternly, “dance with your mother.”

Sapnap howls with laughter and Dream finds himself giggling, too. It’s sweet, thinking of them swaying together in a kitchen long ago. He loves that they can have this again.

George gives in, he was always going to give in, and with a put upon air of discomfort, grabs his mother by the waist. They spin around and around and giggle while they do it.

“I want to dance,” Sapnap whines, standing up from the barstool. He punches Dream in the arm, “Dance with me, bro.”

Dream isn’t getting out of this one. He stands up, too, walking over to the open part of the kitchen and lets Sapnap grab him by the waist. He has a horrible flashback to middle school where the P.E. teacher tried to teach a group of thirteen year olds how to slow dance, but doing it with Sapnap is more fun than staring at Shirley Nelson’s braces and hoping he doesn’t pop a boner.

No chance of that here. Sapnap copies Kate and George, who looks much more refined, even if they’re out of practice and while they’re off beat, Dream thinks they’re all having fun. He lets himself be dipped, absolutely accepting that there’s a chance Sapnap drops him on his back either out of incompetence or humor, and his head goes woozy when he’s pulled back up too quickly.

“Kate, don’t hog my Gog,” Sapnap says after another song starts, letting go of Dream and cutting into Kate and George. She relents with a smile and twirls herself over to Dream and curtsies elegantly. He laughs and offers his arms.

Sapnap and George spend more time arguing about who gets to lead than actually dancing, but they’re having a blast while they’re doing it, and Dream’s watching them out of the corner of his eye while he lets Kate teach him how to move.

“You need to lead, Dream,” she says, the hand on his shoulder pushing him back and forth, like trying to wake a coma patient.

“You can do it, you know what you’re doing,” he argues and she rolls her eyes.

“You need to learn so you can dance with your spouse one day.” It’s a compelling argument, one that makes him think that he’d love to do this all the time. A tradition is born, or re-born for George, in this kitchen. There won’t be a time he cooks with music without thinking about dancing on these tiles, his arms around someone he cares about—Sapnap, Kate, or even George.

It’s silly and exhilarating and something about moving his body brings joy to him. He can’t keep the smile off his face.

“Switch again,” Sapnap says, dropping George mid dip like Dream thought he’d do to him. Sapnap snaps Kate out of his arms and they spin together around the kitchen, crossing into the living room even. There’s probably a word for that dance move, but Dream doesn’t know it.

“Dream?” George says from the floor. He quickly holds out his hand to pull George up, using enough strength that he lands against his chest. Taller than his mom, George feels better in his arms. Just as composed and knowledgeable as Kate, but right. He spins him around fast to make him laugh. It works and George is capable enough to land back in Dream’s arms, pulling them into the proper form with George cast as the “man,” bringing his arm down to Dream’s waist. They dance quietly for a few beats while Dream gets used to it, listening in on the chaos Kate’s dealing with in partnering Sapnap.

“This is better than when I learned to dance in middle school,” Dream confesses to George when he

manages not to step on Dream's toes, "You're a much better teacher than my seventh grade P.E. coach."

George makes a face of repulsion, "Sounds awful."

"It was," Dream agrees, hand light on George's thin shoulder. He loves that George has been here long enough now that he takes comfort in the way he smells, "A hot gym in a Florida summer. Girls with cooties and having to touch each other?"

"Awkward boners?"

"Oh for sure," Dream says, laughing easily. "Got good at covering it up."

"Show me how you middle school danced," George demands, that mischievous spark present in his eyes, total chaos demon.

Dream pulls away from him, using one finger to touch George's shoulder where he's been holding him, and exaggeratedly moving his hips back. George cracks up. Dream loves to see it.

"Now show me how you danced in high school," George demands again, total brat.

"I left high school by the time the dancing got... interesting," Dream explains, pulling George back to how they were dancing before, "but I think it was more like this," he reaches around George and grabs a handful of his ass and then laughs hysterically and quickly moves his hand back to his shoulder.

"Dream!" George says, fake outrage loud.

"What?" Dream shrugs, trying to appear contrite. It's not a natural state for him, and by George's amusement, he's not pulling it off at all.

"Naughty boy."

"That's how they dance in American high schools!" Dream laughs, trying not to think about how good that handful felt under his palm, he can't believe George walks around with that thing all day, "just ask Sapnap."

"Sapnap probably invented it," George side eyes the man in question where he's dancing good-naturedly with Kate in the living room. They're showing each other crazy spin moves and having the time of their lives.

Dream rolls his eyes, "he's younger than us, George. Dirty dancing has been around since at least the '80's."

"He could find a way," he says because he's never found a hill he doesn't want to die on, "What dancing happens after high school, then? There aren't dances at uni, are there?"

"Clubbing, I guess," Dream says, searching his memory. He didn't do college and didn't do the clubbing scene, either.

"How do they dance in American clubs?" George asks, knowing full well that Dream hasn't been, that he didn't even turn twenty-one until they were in the middle of a pandemic and he had a face to conceal. Of the two of them, Dream knows George has more knowledge on this subject, but he can go with the bit.

“Well,” Dream says, feeling his voice dip deeper into a light flirtation. He can’t help it, it’s what George brings out of him. He does it on stream, in voice calls, and now in person. There’s just something about the reaction it gets, the shock and embarrassment on George’s face. “I think in clubs there’s less hiding your boner and more, like, rubbing it up against your partner. I’ll spare you, though.”

“Gee, thanks—”

“Because I know how much you’d like it,” Dream interrupts, “Wouldn’t want to tease you.”

“You idiot! You fucking wish,” George hits him in the shoulder with a closed fist, but his mouth is grinning. “You *would* have a boner right now. You perv.”

“I got a feel of that dump truck, can you blame me?”

The music turns to the next song and it’s slow, the beat and melody something sensual and Dream’s face starts to burn, his heart speeds up as the song slows down. Suddenly everything’s different. George feels differently in his arms, warmer, electric.

Their bodies moving against each other spark Dream’s imagination. He looks into George’s brown eyes and then he can’t look away. He’s stuck, struck in the head. George’s cheeks flush pink and Dream gathers him closer. In for a penny, in for a pound. If they’re going to dance in the kitchen, he wants to do it right. George leans his head on Dream’s shoulder and takes the lead, pushing Dream backwards with their combined hands. It’s time like this that he really feels how much smaller George is. With such a big personality, it’s easy to overlook sometimes. He fits perfectly in Dream’s arms. God, Dream can’t think about it for too long.

He closes his eyes and focuses on staying in the moment.

“Sometimes I still can’t believe you’re real,” he whispers to George, something in him needing George to know, “I can’t believe you’re really here.”

He holds him tighter to his chest, George’s hand sure in his. “It’s been two months, Dream,” George says but he’s not disagreeing.

“I think I’ll always feel this way,” he says in his ear, glad George can’t see his face right now, knowing his whole heart would be exposed. But he can’t stop himself from saying it either. George knowing how valued he is trumps Dream’s pride. “I’m glad you’re here.”

In true George fashion, he’s allergic to sincerity. “Okay, simp,” he says, but his hand squeezes Dream’s and he knows what he means.

“Yo,” Sapnap says and Dream jerks backwards. “Dream, did you tell people George’s mom is in town?”

“What?” George asks, an edge to his voice. He steps out of Dream’s reach and immediately Dream feels colder.

“Um,” he scratches the back of his head, “maybe?”

“Oh, calm down,” Kate says at the outraged look on George’s face, “we went out to have fun and Dream ran into some little fans.” Funny how she does not mention the kids who so horribly defeated them are the very same fans. Well, Dream won’t tell either. “They wanted to know who I was.”

“Mum,” George says, “I didn’t want you to have to deal with fans. I’ve kept you out of—Dream knows I’ve kept you out of everything for your privacy.”

Okay, yeah, maybe Dream fucked up here. This was not his call. He would be livid if George tweeted out a picture of his mom or any of her information or whatever. Less so now that he’s face revealed. If people really tried (and he’s sure they have) they could easily find her, find the whole family. Whoa, he might need to sit down.

“George, I—”

“Don’t, Dream,” George pulls out his phone and starts scrolling through twitter, checking the damage. By the scowl on his face, the super sleuths already put it all together. One of the ten year olds could have had an older sibling who inferred more than he meant to give away.

“George,” Kate says now, “I’m okay with being out there. They’ll know who I am when Dream’s video comes out, anyway.”

“*What?*” George looks up, glances between Kate and Dream. Dream wants to sink into the floor. Okay, this isn’t good.

“Dream invited me to be in a video for his new series,” she says calmly, proudly, and that alone keeps Dream sane in the wake of George’s anger.

“Your new series, bro?” Sapnap says, excitedly. He’s been in every one of Dream’s brainstorming sessions, looking deeply for the next phase of his channel, a way to marry Minecraft with IRL content. George, too, but Sapnap’s gotten the brunt of it recently.

“Yeah,” he says, reluctant to get as excited as he feels with George glaring daggers into the side of his head.

Sapnap opens his arms wide, gesturing wordlessly to tell him everything. Dream lets himself get hyped. He can apologize to George later. “I’m going to interview people from other generations and see, like, how they feel about video games. What it was like when they were coming out, the real scoop, you know? Maybe make them learn a couple things about Minecraft, if they’re willing. And if they have a personal connection to us,” he looks over at Kate with a smile, “then it’s even better. It means something more.”

He’s oversimplifying it. But that’s the elevator pitch. He’ll find a way not to make it boring, to keep the adrenalin pumping and the stakes high. Maybe cash prizes, maybe something else. He has more resources to pull something like this off than he did when he started out. And a larger pool of famous people who might be tempted to be interviewed by him.

“And you’re starting with my mum?” George asks, not impressed.

“What’s wrong with me, hon?” Kate asks, guilt trip fully engaged. Dream smirks, she’s a force to be reckoned with.

“Nothing, Mum,” George assures her.

Kate doesn’t look assuaged, she brings her hand to her hip and even Dream who’s barely known her for three days knows that’s not a good sign. George gulps. “Then what’s wrong with Dream starting his series with me?”

“I just thought he would want to start with his own mum,” George argues and it’s not bad, but Dream can beat him.

“Well, I won’t have Kate around forever to really interview her,” Dream says with a half shrug. “I can interview my mom anytime.”

“I want to do a video with Kate,” Sapnap says. “Wish we had filmed us baking all those cookies and shit. That would have popped off.”

“It was organic and in the moment,” Kate says with a touch to Sapnap’s shoulder. “I wouldn’t have opened up as much if we were recording.”

Sapnap lulls his head as if in agreement, “Point, Kate-o.”

“You ‘opened up’ to Sapnap?” George asks accusingly.

“Not about anything like you’re thinking,” Kate says and Dream looks down, guiltily because she did with him, didn’t she? Dream didn’t think George would mind at the time, thought that they could go over the conversation in depth so he could know everything, but now he wonders if he overstepped. Maybe George just needs to calm down and it’ll be fine.

“I just don’t want people harassing you, Mum,” George says and Dream’s mind drifts to Tommy’s situation. The fans found his mom’s social media and went wild with it, despite his pleas not to. At least Mrs. Simons put herself out there previously, already had a Youtube page and a twitter. Kate doesn’t have either of those.

“I’m proud to be associated with you, honey,” Kate tells her son, a hand in his hair to try to tame it. “I wouldn’t mind if your fans wanted to talk to me about you. Or Dream. Or Nick.”

“Some of them aren’t fans, though,” George protests. “Some of them hate us and would be mean to you.”

Most of the hate is for me, Dream thinks and swallows that bitter pill. George is trying to save his mom from Dream’s ability to draw hatred from people.

“People have been mean to me before, George, and people will be rude again in the future. I’m a big girl, I can handle it.”

“I don’t think you really understand, Mum,” George says and Dream knows he’s thinking of all the shit Dream’s gone through, all the late night phone calls he’s been on dealing with Dream’s reaction to the evilness of people online, before Dream’s skin thickened and he felt every barb like an arrow.

“Well, it’s too late now,” she says confidently, “only way to move is forward.”

The oven timer dings and Dream lets out an involuntary sigh. Dinner is served.

Chapter End Notes

Another update! Things will slow down a bit after this. Chapter 6 needs more than a cursory edit before it can go up. But not too long. Thank you for all your comments and kudos.

Back to reading more of DNF week fics

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Beach Day!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George is still annoyed through dinner, but it gets harder and harder to maintain between the excellent roast and the good humor of everyone else. Mum seems lighter, has done since he walked into the kitchen and saw her for the first time today. The Mum of the last few days wouldn't have danced like that in the kitchen, fuck, the Mum of the last ten years hasn't danced like that. At least not with George. And it was their thing.

Mum has rituals with Neve, too. He knows she does, things he's not privy to, and that's okay. He knows they shop together, bake cakes and cookies in ever more intricate designs, or at least they did before George went to uni. Dancing in the kitchen was his thing with Mum.

He likes that they extended it to Dream and Sapnap, that it can become their thing, *collectively*.

In the depths of his heart, George thinks maybe he liked dancing with Dream a little too much, that he reacted so strongly to Mum's breach of privacy because he was already over stretching himself to patch the holes in his box lid. Dream's fiery hands on him, his humor, that little breathy laugh against his temple, saying things like how glad he is George is here with him—George was barely holding it together as it was. To then learn in the next breath that Dream let the cat out of the bag that his mother is here? Well, it hit like a one two punch.

After dinner, Mum pleads exhaustion and says she's not going to sleep yet, but she's going to binge their videos and get caught up on everything. "I'm tired of being left out," she says, "I should already know these."

Dream's face lights up and he starts naming off videos from each of their channels that she just has to watch. George doesn't know how he remembers these things, how he can name three videos from each of their channels that he thinks best fits the tone of all of them, a best representation.

He starts scrambling around for a piece of paper to write a list for her, and coming up short. This isn't really a paper friendly household. They do everything electronically, so watching Dream rummage through their junk drawer is pretty funny. He eventually gives up when he comes up with a better solution.

"Give me ten minutes," he says, eyes bright and calculating, "and I'll make a play list for you and send it."

George watches Dream's brain turn over. It's still new to watch his train of thought play out all over his face. He's used to hearing it over the phone, being party to the genius via charged silence while Dream sorts out his thoughts. Apparently it's never been stagnant, Dream's all large hand movements and over the top facial expressions, energy pouring off of him contagiously.

George waits for it.

“This could be a good thing for like people just being introduced to us, too,” he says. *There it is.* “You hear about this Dream guy and his Manhunt friends and have no idea where to even start, right?”

“Yes,” Mum says, exactly in that boat right now.

“So, this can be what people look to, a primer of sorts,” he finishes, excitedly. George wonders if he just witnessed the start of a new trend. Will there be playlists on every Minecraft Youtuber’s channel with their “Intro to...” located at the top for the ease of new viewers?

“It’ll be like the link you send your friends when you want them to get into something with you,” Sapnap adds. He’s probably thinking of the hundreds of animes he’s tried to get Dream and George to watch with him over the years. George doesn’t have the heart to tell him it’s not that the anime is inaccessible, it’s that he doesn’t give a shit about anime. That’s Karl’s job.

“A couple Manhunts,” Dream keeps thinking out loud, “the colorblind glasses video from George, the Minecraft in 2-D video from Sap...”

“A Minecraft, But... video,” George nods to Sapnap, “and a weird mob video.”

“My friend is a pet,” Sapnap contributes, eyebrows raising up and down quickly at Dream and George.

“Thanks for the idea, Kate,” Dream says, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek. “I’ll text it to you in a few.”

“You’re welcome?” Mum says to Dream’s back. He’s already on his way to his office to put it together. She looks at Sapnap and George, “I had nothing to do with his idea. Why did he thank me?”

“That’s just Dream for you,” Sapnap says and he’s right.

“You learn to just go with it,” George tells her.

“If you’re George, you use it win arguments later,” Sapnap says and George punches him in the arm. That’s the best thing about real life teasing with Sapnap.

Dream’s still riding the high of this idea well into the evening. “I ended up with three from each channel,” he tells George while he’s brushing his teeth. This isn’t even Dream’s bathroom, he followed him in like a lost puppy. “I didn’t want it to be too long, you know? That’s why I went with one of the thirty minute Manhunts, too. It shouldn’t take up an entire day to get through.”

“Smart,” George says through a thick goop of toothpaste suds. If Dream is disgusted, then he shouldn’t have tried talking to George during this task.

“Do you think I should tweet it out?” Dream asks unnecessarily because they both know he’s going to. They both know Dream can’t sit on an idea longer than it takes to confirm he’s not going to get canceled over it. Sometimes not even that long. It’s progress to even ask George’s opinion at

this point.

He spits into the sink, cutting his usual brushing time a bit short. It's obvious he's not going to get out of this conversation. "Yeah, absolutely," he says. "Make it publicly available and like a pinned tweet, too."

George rinses his toothbrush and walks down the hall to Dream's room, the sound of Sapnap's screams coming from the cracked door to George's room. Sapnap himself is sequestered in his bedroom. If the trend continues as it has, then he's playing Valorant with Punz, likely screaming down there as well.

"She's really watching them," Dream says behind him.

"You act like millions of people haven't watched them before," George says with a laugh.

"I know," Dream throws himself onto the carefully made bed, "but not where I can witness them do it. I've never witnessed someone watch my videos for the first time. Or at all. I mean, like, you and Sapnap don't count, obviously."

"Obviously," George says, closing the door since Dream didn't.

Dream spins onto his back, his hands behind his head and his ankles crossed. He looks over at George and says, conspiratorially, "It's kind of exciting, isn't it?"

The littlest things get to Dream, excite him. It's cute.

"Like, I already love your mom, and we had a really good talk today, but she's going to know me more after watching those videos. We talked about like my passion for them, your passion for them, but she's going to see it and like get it now."

"What else did you talk about?" George asks, coming to sit on the bed near Dream's hip. What could they have spent an entire afternoon discussing? His brain spins in circles coming up with things, each one worse than the last. He can't help but think he's the main thing they have in common... hours and hours of them talking about him, dissecting him? He hates the idea. Between the two of them, they could rip him apart.

Dream's arm comes out from behind his head to rest on George's thigh, "We talked about the stuff with your dad, stuff about them together, your childhood. A lot of things, actually."

"Anything you can share with me?" George asks, confused as to why he's not deadly jealous that Dream knows these things about his mum, that he's not burning with selfish curiosity, to hoard her secrets for himself.

"I can share everything with you," Dream tells him, squeezing his thigh. "But do you want to know?"

George hesitates. Does he? The answer to that question is usually YES. He hates being left out, hates not knowing things, he would rather not know there's a secret than know it's being kept from him. It makes him want to dig and dig until he uncovers it, no matter how grisly or uncomfortable.

"Do you think I should know?"

Dream doesn't answer right away, like he's debating the question in his mind. It's almost a full minute before he says, "Do you trust me?"

“Of course I do,” George answers, almost offended he would even ask, “You know I do.”

“Then maybe you can just trust me to hold onto the information,” Dream suggests, eyes pleading and hand heavy on George’s leg, “and I’ll tell you if you need to know? Or when you decide you’re ready to know? Just let me hold onto it for you.”

“Yeah,” George says, a veil of relief coming down around him, Dream will handle it. “I can live with that.”

Dream’s answering smile lights up the dark room.

“Hey, I’m sorry by the way,” he slides his hand off George’s leg.

George hums, letting him say more, knowing he’s dying to. Dream can’t ever just apologize and leave it at that, he has to talk, explain himself, something.

“I shouldn’t have said Kate was your mom,” he says, “I didn’t think how that would make you feel. I know how protective you are of them—your family. I like that you are, that you get it, why I’m that way too. So, I’m sorry I spilled the beans.”

“You were working with updated information,” George says after a moment because he’s had a while to think about it now. He’s still annoyed, but he knows it wasn’t malicious. “I didn’t know she agreed to be in a video.”

What he means by that is that Dream didn’t expose a secret, because he knows she’ll be out there soon enough. He’s flaunting being close to George, being trusted enough to hang out with his mum alone, and creating intrigue, suspense. The sad thing is, George doesn’t think Dream even realizes he was doing that, tapping into his marketing brain.

If Mum hadn’t agreed to be in the video, Dream likely would have never mentioned her to anyone.

“The idea came to me in the moment,” Dream admits, though he already talked at length about the Eureka moment at dinner and now George feels like he knows the whole story. “And I didn’t think to like, explain to her what internet fame would be, that people knowing who she is would be, could be, dangerous for her. And she’s stubborn, so when you pushed her on it...”

“Yeah, I know how she is.”

“At least you come by it honestly.”

“She would never break a promise,” George says, adding this to the list of things he hopes he’s gotten from his mother, it’s one of her best qualities in his opinion. “So if she said she’ll be in your video, it doesn’t matter what the consequences are, she won’t let you down.”

Dream’s face is serious, like he’s thinking and George marvels again that he can see it, not just listen to his breaths and guess his mood. “I’ll make sure she makes an informed decision,” he eventually says. “Give her every opportunity to back out and let her know, honestly, that it won’t be letting me down.”

“Okay,” George says, relief coursing through him.

“But, George, if she wants to do it, I’m not going to say no, either.”

Idiot. “Fine.”

“You don’t have to like it,” Dream says.

“Good, because I don’t.”

“Are we arguing about this?”

George takes a deep breath and considers the situation. He knows Dream thinks he can’t let things go, and sure he struggles with that sometimes, but even he can see a sinking ship. Dream and Mum are going to be those violin players on the deck of the sinking Titanic.

Not that he thinks the video will be bad, or exploitative or whatever. He knows it won’t, trusts Dream to be courteous to his mum, to find a facet he can share with the internet and fascinate them. He just knows in his gut that the video will happen, no matter that Dream will explain more in depth and give Mum a chance to back out. She won’t.

So he eschews that argument. He’d rather focus his energy on things that it’s not inevitable he’ll lose.

“No, not arguing about this more,” George ends up landing on. Dream’s hand comes back to his thigh, giving him an affectionate pat.

The blaring alarm wakes George the next morning. Dream set it up for the most annoying one to go off, worried they wouldn’t be awake in time for the beach trip. Kate had promised at dinner to wake them if they needed her to so they could get an early start, but George knew that having her walk in and wake them up would be humiliating. If how he woke up yesterday is any indication, he and Dream find each other in their sleep and the morning always finds them entangled.

Sure enough, Dream is spooned up behind him when the alarms rouse him to the waking world. “Ugh,” Dream complains, reaching over George to the nightstand and batting the button on his phone to make it stop. His shirtless skin is warm against George, the sparse hair a little scratchy. Dream’s hips shift with his movement to turn the alarm off—George jumps out of bed.

“Who are you and what have you done with my friend George?” Dream asks, voice low and rumbling. It makes a shiver go down George’s back and he’s glad he got up when he did. There’s only so much a guy can take.

“The beach, Dream,” George says, trying to come up with an excuse to have risen so quickly. “I haven’t been to the beach since I got here.”

“Ugh,” Dream says again, turning over onto his back and rubbing his eyes.

“Get up, you big oaf. We’re going to the beach!” and now he’s actually getting excited from faking it, like those golf players who mentally watch themselves get holes in one and then make it happen. He psyched himself into it.

The bathroom in the hallway is occupied, so George slips into his own room to find his new swim trunks and a t-shirt. He considers showering and then discards the idea just as quickly, he’s just going to get gross between the sand and salt and sweat, he’ll save it for later.

And he'll spend some time thinking about their positions this morning, about what could have happened if he didn't jump out of bed when he did. What Dream would feel like pressed along his back, hot and hard and—

Downstairs, George finds Sapnap in red swim trunks and black t-shirt brewing coffee for Mum and an assembly line of breakfast burritos, bacon and tortillas already lined up.

“Oh good,” he says when George shows up, “you can make the eggs.”

“Thank god you waited for someone competent to do that part,” George says, the phantom smell of burnt, hot sauce caked eggs coming back to haunt him.

“Yeah, yeah, hot shot,” Sapnap grumbles, “let's see you try.”

They bicker half-heartedly until Dream arrives dressed in his blue swim suit and shirt, his hair still sticking up on one side. George doesn't find it endearing, he doesn't.

“Here, take over on these eggs,” George tells him, holding the spatula out for Dream to take. “I've gotta use the bathroom and get ready.”

“Hey, bring my sunscreen from my bathroom, would you?” Dream asks, “Just realized I forgot it up there.”

“Sure,” George promises, ignoring the look from Sapnap.

In twenty chaotic minutes, they're set and headed down the road to the beach. Dream lets Mum sit up front and neither Sapnap nor George argue about it, both content with being stuck in the back as long as the other is too.

Dream talks quietly with Mum in the front while Sapnap and George show each other memes and talk shit in the Sex Havers group chat, knowing Dream won't see it for hours. They make their own entertainment and while the mid-morning sun shines through the window, he knows he's living his best life.

The wind is strong when they arrive, whipping sand across George's calves while he helps Sapnap put up the umbrella. Dream drags the cooler of drinks and snacks from the car and Mum not so subtly takes pictures of them while she carries the beach bag full of their towels and sun cream.

Her hat almost flies off in the breeze and George watches her tie it under her chin.

“George!” Sapnap says, “pay attention.”

“Shut up, idiot,” George says lamely, knowing he was in the wrong, and continues to hold the umbrella still while Sapnap covers the base in sand to keep it from disappearing into the wind. Dream paid good money for this thing, wouldn't want to lose it the first time they try it out.

When they finish burying the umbrella, George realizes Dream and Mum did everything else. He really takes in the beach this time, seeing very few people scattered up and down the sand. Chances are low of running into fans here. And with that in mind, he slips his shirt off. It'll be nice to not be blindingly pale.

“Here,” Dream hands the sun cream to him forcefully, “you're still burnt from Disney.”

“Oh my god, you are so annoying,” George says but he takes it from Dream and starts applying it to his face, handing the tube back over when he's taken enough for the job. Dream whips his shirt

off, puts it and George's safely in the beach bag, and then starts rubbing sun cream into his chest.

George can't look. He might need to dip in the water. Yeah, that's sounding more and more like a good idea. He rushes through doing his own chest and legs, eyes strictly away from Dream and on his task.

"Get my back?" Dream asks over his shoulder. George takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. Dream's skin in the sunlight shines, he's tan and his shoulders are so broad and George can barely breathe. "George?"

"What? Oh, yeah, sure," he takes the sun cream back from Dream and starts rubbing it onto Dream's wide back, trying not to focus on the muscle or how soft his skin is, with mixed results.

He has the faintest little freckles all over his shoulders. Did George know that before? Does Dream even know? He fights down the urge to kiss them as delicately as they appear.

"Here, let me get yours, too," Dream says when George declares him done. "Turn around."

Oh no, this is even worse. His hands on Dream was bad enough, but Dream's hands on him? How long are you supposed to wait before swimming? He hopes immediately is okay because that's exactly what's happening in a couple seconds here. He needs the freezing water to help him control himself.

"Sapnap, last one in is a rotten egg," he yells over the breeze the second Dream's hands stop.

"What—" Dream says but George is long gone before he can hear the rest of the sentence. He tumbles into the waves with Sapnap a hair's breath behind him, screaming the way that never fails to make George laugh.

Spraying Sapnap with ocean water to celebrate his victory, George yells, "You suck, loser!"

"You cheated," Sapnap protests, "No way you could beat me in a fair race. No way."

"Yeah, what, are you going to cry about it?" George taunts, using the banter to pull himself together. Sapnap rages and tackles him, both of them falling into the cold water together. They come up spluttering with laughter, spraying each other again and again until Mum walks into the ocean and they call a reluctant truce.

He looks to the shore to find Dream, wondering why he hasn't joined them, only to see his phone lower. Bastard got them on video. George crooks a finger at him, begging him to join them.

The water is much warmer than its counterpart in Brighton.

The sun is high in the sky when they decide it's time to go. Between swimming, the harsh rays, and the racing, George is exhausted.

Sapnap packs up with Mum, the cooler much lighter with the snacks and drinks consumed. Light enough to not need Dream to lift it.

George stares out over the water, taking a moment for himself. The waves hum loud enough to

drown out most of the extraneous noise and George allows his mind to wander.

His parents might split up. At twenty five he didn't think he'd have to deal with a crisis like this. He thought he was past the age where this would apply to him, like if his parents made it this far, why wouldn't they make it forever?

He pulls his knees up against his chest. What he said to Dream before still applies—he didn't think they were *happy* but he didn't think they were unhappy either. He's ashamed to say he didn't think much of the state of their marriage, didn't wonder if they were happy or if the relationship was even healthy. Who worries about that?

A white sand dollar blinks up at him from the sand, partially buried and misshapen. He picks it up, rinses it off in the gentle crest of waves hitting his feet. He likes it.

Mum seems happier here, more alive. She and Dream must have had a productive talk. Something sparked and he's thrilled to see her laughing easier, opening up, dancing again. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees her playing some hand jive game with Dream who likes to play those with his little sister, always down to learn a new one and memorize them for the next time she's over. Mum looks younger, and it's not the haircut or the elegant new bathing suit, it's something in her spirit. Whatever it is, George is thrilled to see it.

He doesn't know what will happen if they do decide to split. The uncertainty bothers him. Where will Neve go for Christmas? Will Dad just permanently disappear into the garage? Will he ever hear from him again? They aren't the closest, barely having any common ground to talk about now that they don't live together. The last couple times they've spoken were when Mum called George and then handed the phone over for a minute until Dad awkwardly got through pleasantries and handed it back over.

He has fond memories as a kid, Dad taking him to the park and teaching him to ride a bike, kid stuff that all dads do. George tried to play football for a while, simply to have something to do with his dad, but god he hated it. George is a late bloomer, all the other boys in his class grew faster than him, bigger than him, and then were meaner. George didn't like the roughness of football, preferred to catch frogs down at the pond, chase glow worms at twilight in the summer. When he almost broke his leg at a match, he finally gave up on football for tennis and that marked the decline in his relationship with Dad.

For uni, he went against Dad's advice to study business and chose programming. The only bright part of his uni years with Dad was when he brought Amanda home, his girlfriend of two years that made Dad remember getting together with Mum. For a brief period, it was like Dad was proud of him again, had something he could understand about his son, something to bond over.

And then he and Amanda broke up. And he couldn't properly explain to his dad *why*.

He loves his dad, but it's hard to like him sometimes.

Still, he can't imagine him not with Mum, out on his own. How will his mother support herself? She was a teacher when he was a kid, but that's a long time ago now. Will she want to do that again? There are so many variables and he hates not knowing everything.

The waves pick up, harsher crashes than when they first arrived. It's scary out there now, George watches a grown man bowled over by the power in the ocean. His head bobs back up and George lets out a breath. He can't even rescue himself, let alone some stranger. The person gives up, wisely, and swims to shore.

It's funny to think how powerful the ocean is, how a day like today can be fun and exhilarating, but in an instant it can tip over into dangerous. The small wave that erases the heart drawn in sand for an instagram photo, can turn within minutes into a tsunami and strip skin from bone.

George feels like that. He thinks about what his mother said, how he feels things so deeply and in this moment he feels every iota of it, overwhelming him.

George walks away from the beach knowing he is the ocean. Too dangerous. Too catastrophic.

Too much.

No one wants someone who is too much.

He'll drown them.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to come talk to me on tumblr or twitter: @scoops404

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

While George stares into the ocean like he's auditioning to be in another music video, Dream spends their time packing up spit-balling ideas for the video with Sapnap and Kate. They didn't bring a lot of stuff to the beach, so it only takes a couple minutes to get everything together. Dream organizes the party in that he yells at Sapnap to get the umbrella while he scouts a public trashcan to get rid of the remnants of their snacks from earlier. Kate whips the towels to try to free them from the sand, a thankless and ultimately useless task, but his car appreciates her efforts.

They can all tell George is going through something so Dream leaves him be, only calls to him when the car is packed and they're ready to go. It's been a lovely day, Dream thinks. He doesn't go to the beach very often, not as often as people think he might as he lives in Florida. Growing up, his family made it a point to do it once or twice a summer while all the kids were out of school, but hey, every other family and many out-of-towners had the same idea, and it was always packed.

It's nice today. A school day and mid-week, not many people shared the white sands with them and Dream is happy to have the freedom. George continues to live in his own little world, his face a thunderstorm in contrast to the cloudless sky outside while they drive home, but he eventually starts to add to the conversation about logistics on recording.

Dream insists on treating everyone to a nice dinner so he has Sapnap place an order and they pick the food up on the drive, everybody agreeing they didn't want to go in and sit down, but neither did anyone want to cook. It works out. They eat their food at the rarely used dining room table, exchanging stories and asking questions, and then trickle into the living room to watch a movie. Dream gives Kate his seat on the couch and plops down on the floor in front of George, leaning his back against George's warm shins. He only kicks him once and it's very light. He counts it as a win.

Everybody drifts to bed pretty quickly after the movie's over, Sapnap disappears off to his bedroom behind the kitchen and Dream and George follow Kate upstairs, talking about recording times and reliving the horrible movie they just watched. Kate bids them good night, saying she has a few more of their videos to watch before she truly sleeps, wanting to be prepared for tomorrow's recording, and Dream's heart warms. He said as much to George yesterday, but it's fun watching her watch his videos, go back through the catalogs. He plans on asking her about it in depth tomorrow in the recording. He might not use that part, he plans on keeping it pretty loosey goosey so he can edit it into whatever seems right. There's a long list of questions haphazardly entered into the notes app on his phone. He'll see how many he gets through.

It's exciting to have a new direction to go in. Manhunt served him well and he's not sure that he's one hundred percent done with it forever, but it does feel like the right decision. Letting go of it in order to grow in another direction. He doesn't want to overstay his welcome, rather leave on a high note than be booed off the stage when he drags it out too long. He's seen and counseled other Youtubers stuck in a content rut—making the same videos over and over until they drive off their entire audience. Dream made a decision early on that he didn't want to be like that. He's growing and learning and to keep doing Manhunt would preclude him from doing anything else, something that might creatively fulfill him in another way. He doesn't want to miss out.

"Did you have a good day?" George asks when he returns from brushing his teeth down the hall. Dream really should have just told him to keep his tooth brush in the en suite while he's staying in

Dream's room. It makes way more sense for the two of them to share his bathroom instead of Dream using the biggest bathroom alone and the other three sharing the hallway bathroom.

"I did," he says, surprised to find how true that is. Days are almost exclusively labeled "good" now that George is here. He spent time with his people, went to the beach and got some sun, ate good food, and got to brainstorm ideas. If only he'd had an orgasm, this day would have been perfect. "Did you? Are you done brooding?"

"Wasn't brooding," George protests while he climbs into bed.

"Convincing argument," Dream says back, reaching out to tickle George long enough to make him laugh and show Dream isn't serious.

"Shut up, idiot," George says through gritted teeth, body curled to keep Dream's fingers from making it farther.

"You want to talk about it?" Dream offers, knowing the answer already. George doesn't. He can't stop offering though because one day George might take him up on it before he gets to the absolute end of his rope. Or, maybe the day he does get to the end of his rope and he needs Dream to just ask. So he can answer.

"Not really."

"Okay," Dream says.

"Oh, shit," George says, sitting up. He walks out of the room, maybe he forgot something. Dream waits silently, almost holding his breath. He could try to sleep, there's no reason not to.

Except that he wants George here, next to him. He wants George's warmth and presence with him. Luckily, he doesn't have to wait long. George's footsteps pound down the hallway and he's back.

"Where did you—"

"Here," George says and only then does Dream see he's holding something. Dream reaches up to take whatever it is from George's hand, no questions asked. "I left it in my trunks, but, I uh—Got you this."

It's a sand dollar. It's not a perfect circle, but a bit wonky on one side in a way that tells him it was truly alive at one point. It's a husk now, a dried shell, a few grains of sand sticking to it, proof it came from the sea. Dream almost tears up. God, he's a sentimental bastard. They both are.

"Do you like it?" George asks, voice a bit wobbly like he's nervous and it's then that Dream realizes he hasn't spoken, too overcome with George's gift.

He only claims trophies from days he wants to remember.

"Yeah, I—" he clears his throat, "I love it, George. Thank you."

Dream wants to remember this day, too. He stands the sand dollar up, propped up against the picture frame on his nightstand of his family from last Christmas so it will be the last thing he sees at night and the first thing he sees in the morning.

George's face is flush, and he's acting overly nonchalant in a way that proves he's very chalant, if that's even a word. Dream finds it adorable, tries not to make a big deal out of what, to him, is a very big deal.

The cover pulls back and George slips back into bed on his side.

His side. Has anyone ever died from being overly sentimental? Because there might be a first case about to happen. The silence is loud, charged, and Dream can't stand it, can't stand the feeling that he should be doing something, he should be in motion, he should be touching George, somehow, he should—"Want to play me on messenger games?"

"You're going to lose," George says, relief tangible.

"George, c'mon," Dream says, "I never lose."

They stay up way too late giggling, sabotaging each other's turns and talking about anything and everything. Dream falls asleep staring at his sand dollar.

Recording with Kate is a new and rewarding experience, Dream decides. They're sitting in his office, the chair most often occupied by George pulled up next to his gaming chair.

"Your keyboard lights up like George's," she says when he has her sit in the main chair after prepping his recording software.

"Most gaming set ups do," he tells her. "So you can play in the dark."

"Do you often play in the dark?"

"Only when the sun is down."

She touches a few of the keys, not hard enough to press anything. Her back is rigid, a tight line and not even touching the back rest.

"Get comfortable," Dream says, trying to be reassuring. "If there's anything you don't want to answer, you absolutely don't have to. Or, if you talk about something and then realize it's too personal and you don't want to include it, I can edit it out, so don't worry."

"I don't want to mess up," she grabs the mouse and moves it in wide circles. It's then that Dream realizes she's nervous.

"How could you mess up? It's just you and me having a conversation," he reminds her, "We're pretty good at those."

"That's true," she says, "I've shared more with you than, god, probably anyone in the last twenty years. That's kinda sad, huh?"

"No," he says bluntly, "I think it's only sad if you keep yourself closed up."

"So you won't be mad if I'm pants at this?" she points to the middle monitor where the Minecraft title shines proudly.

"Kate, you aren't supposed to be good at this. Literally no one is expecting you to be good at this. That's kinda the point."

“I just don’t want to embarrass you or George,” she says.

“George has done way more embarrassing things online. People will have proof his mum,” he says with a horrible British accent, bad enough to draw out a smile, “is cool as shit? That just gives him more street cred. He doesn’t need any more people thinking he’s cool. It’s going to his head.”

She shakes her head in amusement. “Okay, so where do we start?”

Dream warns her they’re recording, reminds her to talk into the mic, and then walks her through starting a new seed and the very basics of the game. The first few minutes are full of errors, shrieks from Kate when she messes up and Dream’s giggles when the first mob they meet kills her right away. They have such a blast he almost forgets to start asking questions.

She doesn’t manage to slay the dragon, but she’s charmed to know the dragon identifies as female.

“Women are tough as fuck,” Dream says, knowing he’ll have to either bleep that out for the video or edit around it. “Tough as nails,” he says to make his editing life easier. Kate smiles back charmingly.

When they wrap up filming, Dream notices George is streaming. Likely taking advantage of having Kate out of his room and keeping his mind off them spending time together. Dream knows it’s killing George to not be in on this. He offered! Dream asked George if he wanted to sit in on it and George said no, that there was no way he’d be able to keep quiet long enough for them to get a clean recording.

“George is live,” Dream mentions while Kate sits down in the other chair, swapping seats.

“Oh is he? Can we—” she stops herself and Dream turns to look at her, read her face.

“What?”

“Can we watch a little bit?” her hand comes under her chin and Dream gets the impression she’s not sure she’s allowed to watch, uncertain.

“Of course we can,” Dream navigates to the page in about two clicks, it auto fills to George’s stream anyway. “Just to warn you, our fans can tell when I’m watching, like signed into my account like this, so they may call us out. George might start talking to us.”

“Will he know I’m here?”

“Not unless we tell him.”

“Is he okay, you know, with me...?”

“I’m pretty sure he is, but we can always check. Should I DM him first?”

“Yes,” she decides, “let him tell me if he doesn’t want me to watch.”

A familiar wave of pleasure hits him when George gets back to him within seconds—knowing he has George’s attention, his priority even over his chat, it’s addicting.

“He’s fine with it,” Dream tells her and then clicks on the stream, George’s face appearing in HD on the screen. He’s running around his hard core world, the server usually forgotten until he’s bored enough to return and has no one to talk him into playing something else.

“Dream is in chat?” George asks to the camera, acting like he didn’t know Dream asked permission

to join. “Well, hi Dream. Nice to see my number one fan here.” Then he goes back to mining for diamonds or whatever he’s doing.

Kate watches with rapt attention. Dream’s glad he taught her enough about the game now that she understands the mechanics, at least. She’s familiar with the pixels and concept and she can follow him.

“He’s really good at this, isn’t he?” she says after they’ve been watching for a while. “I mean, I know he’s good. I’ve seen the videos, but he’s just sitting there and talking to himself and it’s actually interesting. I can see why people will watch for hours.”

“Yeah, I know,” Dream says, “I think he’s the best streamer out of the three of us. Sapnap’s good too, don’t get me wrong. I just hate the games he always wants to stream. This is, like, peak for me.”

“What? George and Minecraft?”

“Yeah, my two favorite things.”

“I can’t believe the things you say sometimes.”

“Why?”

“You just say... what you’re thinking and feeling. All the time.”

“Well, not all the time,” he insists because he’s learned not to, “but with people I trust? Yeah.”

“Want to play a little prank on him? Kate asks, eyes lighting up mischievously. “Would he be okay with that, do you think?”

“What did you have in mind?”

When Kate tells him, Dream almost falls out of his chair. “Yes, yes! Oh my god, you have to. That’s so good.”

“Can you get it ready?” she nods at the computer and Dream’s hands fly over it, finding George’s discord channel, warnings about being live everywhere and places the mic in front of Kate.

“George? George, honey, is that you?” Kate meets Dream’s eyes and he loves her playing up the dottering old mother angle.

“Mum?” George says in confusion, chat going wild.

“George, can you hear me? I came to clean up in here and saw you on Dream’s computer. Wow honey you look so handsome.”

“Oh... thanks, I guess,” his face blushes. “Mum, I’m—”

“Well, I don’t want to keep you. I know you’re playing your game. I just wanted to tell you I got those stains out with the trick I was telling you about, so no need to worry. I saved your pants!”

Dream bursts out wheeze laughing and the jig is up.

“Mum, I’m live!”

“Oops,” she says, not sorry at all.

“Oh my god, that was good,” Dream says, wiping a tear off his cheek. He hasn’t laughed this hard in, well, since the last time he hung out with Kate.

“Dream, you idiot,” George says, fondness all over his face and in his voice, like a disease without cure, “getting my mum to roast me.”

“The worst part is that it was her idea,” he says in between laughs.

Sapnap won’t shut up about the prank over dinner, to Kate’s delight and George’s dismay. Dream keeps a middle ground and bumps George’s feet under the table. The bump back tells him there are no hard feelings.

“What time is your flight tomorrow, Mum?” George asks.

Kate’s face falls and Dream knows she’s not exactly eager to return. He’s not eager to let her leave, either. He’s grown quite fond of her, likes having her around the house. A small part of him admits, he likes that her presence forces George into his bed. “Around noon, I think. Best get there a couple hours early.”

“I can drive you,” Sapnap says, “we can stop for breakfast or something.”

“I’m going with,” Dream takes the last bite of his chicken.

“You boys are so sweet,” she says, laying a hand on Sapnap’s shoulder, “I’m so glad I’ve gotten to know you.”

“They’re awful,” George says, his nose scrunching up in a way that Dream doesn’t find adorable, “I might leave with you.”

“Georgie, no!” Sapnap says, falling for it.

Dream rolls his eyes, “Shut up, you idiot. You’d be begging to come home the second you touched down.”

George doesn’t deny it, just smiles.

“Glad to have your bed back after tonight?” Kate asks her son, hand running through his hair. She hasn’t managed to convince him to cut it, not even with Dream backing her up.

“Yes, you have no idea,” George says and Dream’s stomach sinks. He wishes he had more food to eat, something to distract himself with. “Are you ready to face... well...”

Kate’s shoulder comes up in a shrug, but she doesn’t let her smile slip. “Got to face the music sometime.”

Dream gets out of doing the dishes since he cooked, leaving Sapnap and George arguing in the kitchen over the best way to clean things, how many dishes can go in the dishwasher, who’s faster at clearing the table, among many things. Dream drifts aimlessly in the living room watching them, seeing them together, in person, he’ll never get over it. He’ll never take it for granted.

“Want to go for a walk?” Kate asks him, startling him. “I’ve been feeling a bit cooped up.”

Dream looks back at George and Sapnap again, now flinging sudsy water at each other and laughing maniacally. Those two idiots will be fine for a bit.

“Sure,” he says, “I’d love to.”

“It’s hard to believe it’s been a week, huh?” Dream asks into the evening air. It’s thick with humidity, but cool enough that the walk won’t kill them.

“I know,” Kate says, “I just got over the jetlag and now I have to go back.”

“You’ll just have to stay longer next time,” Dream says, already looking forward to Kate’s next visit. He knows there’s a lot going on, that she’s in transition along with the entire family, really. Things are up in the air in a way that they’ve never been, not for George, and she’s not certain which side she’ll fall down on. But, he feels like they all received a small blessing out of the circumstances—Dream’s friendship with Kate, for one. Kate and George’s renewed closeness for another.

She turns to him briefly, George’s contented smile on her face. It’s remarkable, he thinks not for the first time, that two people who don’t physically look alike can remind him so thoroughly of each other.

“I look forward to it,” she ends up saying, “Maybe you’ll have a proper guest room by then and George won’t have to give up his bed.”

“Eh, it worked out. We were fine sharing.”

“Hmm, I thought he was lying when he said he was sleeping on the couch. I mean, I came downstairs at 4:00 and he wasn’t there.”

“He slipped in with me,” Dream says, still unsure why. He never asked George, never brought it up the next day and then it felt farther and farther away and too late to ask.

“Nick said he tried his bed first,” Kate says and wrecks Dream’s night.

“What?”

“Yeah,” she says casually, strides not slowing and forcing Dream to catch up if he wants to hear the rest of what she’s saying, “when we made all those muffins you refused to eat,” she teases him lighthearted but he’s not sure he’s in the mood anymore, “Nick said George let himself into his room, woke him up, stole his covers, and then bailed after an hour.”

Hurricane George.

Dream shakes his head, unsure how he’s feeling about this. Except sweaty, he’s definitely sweaty walking in this humidity, no matter that it’s past the heat of the day.

George went to Sapnap first? Why? Just because his room is downstairs and he’s closer?

Something about that doesn't feel right. He tries to imagine George lying in Sapnap's bed, under his covers, something even Dream himself hasn't done. He's laid on top of the bed to keep Sapnap company while he was streaming or playing Valorant, but he's never actually cuddled the homies in Sapnap's bed. It feels like his bed is a sacred place, like Sapnap's inner sanctum and it's sacrilegious to cross into it. Dream thinks Sapnap would let him if he asked, would easily pull back the covers and settle in with Dream, but the thing is: he wouldn't be invited unprompted. He would have to ask.

It doesn't feel right to ask.

And then he thinks about it. His own bed kinda feels like that, too. His inner sanctum in a way that the rest of his bedroom and even his office don't. Like he's accessible there. He wants to be talked to and consulted and teased in those places, but his inner sanctum holds his secrets. That's where he can be his true self, see his fears and desires in his dreams where his conscious mind can't hold them back like lions at the circus. In his bed, the chains dissolve.

He's vulnerable. Samson without his hair.

So why was he so okay with George crawling into his bed? Why did he like knowing George would be with him, even when they went to bed at staggered times, when he decided to go to sleep and George was already there, keeping the blankets warm for him and looking enticing?

If Dream would need an invitation into Sapnap's bed, then likewise he would need to invite Sapnap to his bed, too. He wouldn't oppose if Sapnap asked to lie in his bed with him, but Dream wouldn't offer it up for Sapnap and he wouldn't like to walk in and find Sapnap already there.

For George, his invitation is engraved on the side of the bed, pretty much. It feels *better* with George there, more complete. And what does that even mean?

Why does he dislike the idea of George letting himself into Sapnap's bed so much? Why does he especially hate that he went to Sapnap first? It feels remarkably like a betrayal, and yet it isn't.

And what made George give up on Sapnap's bed and come to his? He obviously stayed there, but it was the very last place he tried. Dream's feelings aren't hurt, they *aren't*. He's just... he's sensitive. They all know he's sensitive, this isn't news.

"You okay?" Kate asks and Dream snaps out of it. He looks up and they've walked about half a mile from the house while he was in his head.

"What? Yeah, I'm fine," he says, you know, convincingly.

"You disappeared for a minute," she says and Dream recognizes that she's asking if he wants to talk about it. It's not that he doesn't want to talk about it, he just has no idea how to even begin. He has no words to formulate why he's feeling like this, discombobulated and discomforted, like a foundation wall fell in his absence and he didn't notice but the whole house is kinda tilting now.

"I—" he tries, mouth gaping open before he closes it again. "I'm not sure how to explain..."

"That's okay," she says, motherly caress on his back strengthening him. "Want to move past it?"

"Yes, please," he's grateful to move on from the subject. "What were we talking about?"

"George displacing your bed with his bad blanket hoarding habits, mostly. Though I'm not sure you heard that part," she answers.

He has to laugh, yeah he didn't hear that part. "He's pretty bad about that, yeah. But, I dunno, it's not like we were ever cold."

"You weren't?" she asks, huffing a sarcastic laugh, "even in the arctic you keep the house in? The hardest worker in that house is the air con, I say with all respect to how hard working you are, love."

"If you were cold, you could have said something!" he says.

She waves him off, "I'm British, I can handle a little cold. I was just surprised to hear you say you weren't cold at night with my son the blanket demolisher."

"Well, I dunno," he watches his feet pound the sidewalk, careful not to step on any of the cracks like he has since he was a kid, "we kept each other warm, I guess."

"You cuddled?"

"That's not what I—I'm not saying—I—"

Kate howls with laughter and it's good to hear it from her, but not at his expense. He feels a pout form on his face and hates himself for it a little bit.

"Sure, dear," she says when she calms down a bit.

"Enough about me," Dream says pointedly. "How are you feeling about going back tomorrow?"

She doesn't answer right away, choosing to think about it for a minute. Dream doesn't mind, keeps pace with her, his long legs making her take two to his every step. "I wouldn't say I'm excited," she ends up saying, "but I'm eager to tackle this head on, you know?"

"Good," he tells her, "I'm proud of you."

"I found a therapist online last night and made an appointment in a couple days, like you said, to talk about everything in depth."

"And Jim?" It feels strange to call George's dad by his name when he knows so very little about him as a person, has never met him, never talked to him.

She shrugs, but her face is determined. "I'm going to talk to him when I get back, I will. I'm going to ask him to let me have some time speaking with a therapist and see where that goes."

"And if he doesn't—"

"If he doesn't like that, then I'll let him go," she says and Dream's so proud of her, proud of her resiliency. This has to be the scariest thing she's ever faced, uprooting her life in her late forties and starting over. Dream can't imagine letting a relationship that significant go, a person like that go. But, he reminds himself of his conversation with George about how close they are... or aren't as the case may be, and realizes that he won't need to let any of his friendships go because his friends have held fast onto him as well, none of them allowed him to splinter off and make his own way into something. None of the friends that are still here, anyway, not the ones that matter.

"Did you end up telling George about what we talked about?" Kate asks and Dream shakes his head.

"No, I didn't."

“You didn’t need to keep it from him. I told you that you could—”

“I know, Kate,” Dream tells her, “He was curious about what we talked about and I offered to tell him, but he decided he was okay with it staying between us.”

“Wow,” is all Kate says.

“Talk about growth,” Dreams agrees.

“He really trusts you. God, just when I think I get a read on you two, when I start to get comfortable, something happens and I get a punch out of nowhere.”

“What?”

“My son really loves you, Dream.”

“I know he does.” Because he does know. George doesn’t say it often, not like Dream who can’t stop saying it, but he still makes it known. He moved from England for Dream and Sapnap, left behind everything he’s ever known. If Dream ever catches him on a bad day, in a bad mood, he reminds himself how much George loves him. That George chose to root himself in Dream’s home soil. Dream knows he’s loved.

“No, Dream. He *loves* you.”

“Yeah, and I love him, too.”

She shakes her head in frustration that Dream doesn’t understand. He doesn’t know how to respond because he doesn’t understand where her frustration is coming from. It’s not negative, he doesn’t feel like he needs to apologize or anything. They walk along in companionable silence for a bit, almost to the point where they need to turn around. He thinks about how quickly she became important to him, how she always was significant abstractly for producing George into the world, but now Kate, independent of George, is important to him.

“What have you always wanted to try?” Dream asks, convinced that no matter what she comes up with, he’ll find a way to make it work, to encourage her.

“I’ve been thinking about it non stop since our talk,” she says, “I think I’d like to try to paint.”

That takes him by surprise. George is so mathematical, technical, not an artistic bone in his body outside of thumbnails, but he hasn’t known Kate long enough to know if she has a talent for it.

“Paint something for our house, then,” he tells her. “Mail it to us or bring it with you next time and we’ll hang it up.”

“You don’t have to do that, Dream, I’m sure my attempts will be pitiful.”

“I’ve seen modern art, if people can call that stuff art then we’ll love whatever you come up with and we’ll hang it proudly. Might even take a picture of it and put it on twitter and credit you.”

“Shut up, Dream,” she says, fondness dripping out.

“I have a new answer when people ask me who my favorite artist is now,” he says with a mischievous grin.

“You haven’t seen one thing I’ve painted,” she protests, mouth wide with a grin.

“You’re still my favorite.”

“You’re very kind, Dream.”

They walk along again enjoying each other’s peace. The sun’s dipping below the horizon now and the palm trees glow gold around them. Luckily, they’re moving too quickly for the mosquitoes to swarm.

“What are you going to say to Jim? Like after the therapy.”

“Well, I probably won’t fully know until after the therapy. That’s mostly the point of the therapy,” she says and he nods, considering. “But I assume it all comes down to if he loves me. If I love him. If we can fall in love again, if he even wants to try.”

“Can you fall in love with him again?” Dream asks, genuinely curious. He can’t imagine falling back in love with someone after falling out of it. Something big would have had to happen for him to fall out of love in the first place. A breach of trust, something like that.

She shrugs, “Dream, I’m not even sure we were ever in love to begin with. Not the way you guys are. With life, with each other, with what you’re doing with your lives.”

Something turns over in his stomach.

“What does falling in love look like to you, Dream?”

“I’ve been in love before,” he starts, stalling for time to answer the question properly. It’s been a while since he’s had to think about this. He remembers how it was with his ex, how it started good, got great, and then the bad times slowly started outnumbering the good times until he found himself at rock bottom. Was that love? He didn’t like what it did to him then, how he became a person who excused things, let things slide, let someone determine his value. That probably wasn’t love. “Actually, I don’t think I’ve been in love before.”

“So what does it look like? How will you know the next time, or when it truly happens?” Kate asks, threading her arm around Dream’s like he’s escorting her to a ball, “This isn’t a test or anything, I’m just curious. I feel like everybody’s answers are different.”

“I guess falling in love starts with a person, right? Or, if you’re inclined, multiple people. That’s not really for me though.”

“Monogamous,” she says and he feels her approval.

“You find a person, there’s a spark or whatever. Maybe you’re attracted to them physically or, or on another level, I don’t know. You start talking to them and see if you like their personality, if your values line up.”

“Okay, let me ask it another way,” she interrupts. “You wake up tomorrow and you’re in a loving, committed, relationship. What does *that* look like?”

“They’re my partner, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then they love George and Sapnap, accept that they’re not going anywhere,” it’s his first point and the most important point because, fuck, that wasn’t a given with his ex. God, he can’t even picture it. No one is going to be able to understand the strength of his ties to Sapnap and George.

He can't imagine being with someone, bringing his emotional problems to them, complaining about being canceled on twitter again, brainstorming ideas for videos with someone else, outside of their circle.

Philza does it. Philza has a whole ass wife who is supportive and included and fun. Will Dream ever be able to find something like that?

"What else?"

"I support them, not just financially," because that's a given for him, he loves to spend his money on people he loves, "but we talk about everything. I encourage them to come to me with their problems. I want to be able to help them."

"Do they help you with yours?"

How can they? How can he go to anyone other than Sapnap, George, Bad, all his friends he's been relying on for years?

"Yeah, but—" he cuts himself off. How can he explain that he handles his shit alone in relationships, or he takes it to his closest friends? Well, he supposes his ex is a bad example. But it's his most recent and most... serious relationship. He couldn't go to her, not in the end. He learned to stop because things he brought to her in good conscience got turned around and thrown back at him later. How can he trust no one will do that to him again? Abuse his trust and his fears and insecurities?

"I have to really trust them," he ends up saying. "And I don't trust very easily. Not these days."

"You trusted me pretty quickly," she says.

This makes Dream smile, "Are you trying to get me to fall in love with you Kate?"

She rolls her eyes but she blushes too and Dream laughs at her being all flustered. "Of course not, you're a child."

"I'm younger than your son! Kate, you cougar."

"Shut up, Dream," she says, giggling good-natured. She's learned quickly to take his teasing in hand, the same he does for hers. "You know that's not what I meant."

"I know, I know," he brings himself back to the topic at hand, "I trusted you because you trusted me, opened up about things I know you didn't want to open up about. You love your son and he loves me, wouldn't want to see me hurt. It hurts him when I hurt," Dream knows this to be true, but it's one of those things that sound weird when you say them out loud. He knows it soul deep that George doesn't like to see him in pain, that before he moved to Florida the hardest part of being away from them was that Dream could hide his pain away and George wouldn't know. George's detective skills had to get really good to call him out on his bullshit, and call him out he did. All the time. Until Dream finally gave in and just started coming to George with his problems so they could skip all the unnecessary drama. "So you wouldn't do anything to hurt me for George's sake."

"It's more than that, honey," she tells him and this he knows, too.

"I know. Now you love me for me. I won another NotFound over. We're besties for life."

"So you trust me, but I would hazard a guess to say you don't trust me like you do Nick and

George.”

“No,” he says bluntly but she’s not hurt. “But then again, there are things I think I’ll feel more comfortable asking you in the future than them. Adult things. Maybe things I don’t want to ask my own mom for fear of dying from embarrassment or something.”

“Definitely want to dive into that later,” she says, with that spark back in her eye, “but I don’t want to derail the rest of the conversation. Trust is important to you.”

“Absolutely,” he says, “might be the most important.”

“So your partner in this exercise has your absolute trust, they accept George and Sapnap, they come to you for help, what else?”

“Life altering sex?” he says, thinking about their conversation from the other day.

She laughs again, “Yeah, that can be important, too. And this is your ideal relationship, so that plays a part.”

“Somebody grounded, and who grounds me. Somebody loving and kind, but not too much. They need an edge to them or I’ll get bored. I need to be kept on my toes. I’m... a lot. I know I’m a lot so I need someone who likes dealing with a lot. I can handle a lot, too, so I’m not like trying to be selfish here.” He starts really getting into it, letting his brain go down paths he’s kept off limits for a long time, ignoring the no trespassing sign.

“Um, what else? I’d love it if they were hot. I mean, that I’m attracted to them like crazy. They don’t need to be a streamer or a Youtuber or anything, but they need to know enough to understand my life, I guess. Maybe that’s selfish, but, I mean, I’m willing to learn about their life, too. Like, if they’re an accountant, I can like, learn numbers? Ugh, no, that’s a lie. I can’t learn numbers, but I can be like supportive about them loving numbers.”

Kate doesn’t interrupt and Dream wanders farther down the path, “Fuck, George loves numbers and that’s only ever been a plus for us, you know? Like, he does all the weird calculations and things. Makes a fucking excel spreadsheet for finances before he even moved here. I guess I need someone like George... someone who drives me up the wall when he won’t admit he’s wrong, but will stay in a call with me for hours to make sure I’m okay, or because he just likes being around me. He makes me better, he calls me out when I need it, he holds me accountable for things, he lets me do the same for him. He’s prickly and guarded, but I like that. I like that I have to work to know things, I have to coax him into letting me in, and he does” Dream says, and finds the easily accessible conclusion here, “So I probably need someone like him.”

“Dream,” Kate says, her tone serious, “I don’t think you need someone like him.”

Dream’s confused, he just went through all this, and—

“I think you’re just in love with George.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 8 is giving me some difficulty but it'll be up soon.

Thank you so much for all your comments and kudos. The people who quote their

favorite parts back to me are literally angel children... like doing the lord's work for real

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all the love on this story so far! You guys are so sweet :)

Posting this and then going to the zoo with my niece and nephew and then I'm enjoying the hell out of MCC's return. I think I'll be watching Punz since Dteam aren't in, but I may change my mind. Have a lovely Saturday!

Dream is acting fucking weird. George doesn't like it one bit. He's been acting weird since he and Mum came back from their walk last night.

And who enjoys walking? Like just for the sake of it? With no destination in mind? George is glad Dream offered to go with her because he's walked enough for this month, between the mall and Disney World, and the beach. Let Dream get his health kicks off with Mum who likes that sort of thing, too. Weirdos.

It does make him wonder, though, if she said something to Dream to make him act this way. It's not anything overt, no glaring signs in neon lights that point between Dream and George. No, it's subtle.

Dream doesn't say anything more than, "okay if I turn out the lights?" when he joins George in bed, way later than he had the night before.

No offer to watch something. No Tik Tok he had to tell George about or force him to watch. No update on what he was working on or who he was talking to or what stream he joined.

Stupid George couldn't fall asleep until Dream joined him, but as wrong-footed as he felt, still fell asleep as soon as Dream got under the covers. How is he supposed to sleep in his own bed tonight? How did it only take a week for him to feel like this is his real room, their room? He feels so natural here, in Dream's space. He thinks his past self was right to draw a line about staying in Dream's room, because now he's fucking addicted to it and he'll never sleep normally again.

George lets the night before go, willing to look past it, that maybe Dream thought he was doing George a favor by letting him go right to sleep for once. Dream would tell him if there was an issue between them, god, he usually can't get Dream to shut up about like communication and making sure they're okay. Dream is the most confrontational person George knows and only in the last year has George accepted that's a good thing, especially in their friendship. Because George will confront anyone over stupid things, games, for a prank, why they searched 'Georgenotfound hot' in their visible browser, but he can't ever bring himself to be the one to discuss emotional matters. That's Dream's purview. They both know it.

In conclusion, yes, Dream would tell him right away if he had done something to offend him or hurt his feelings, he would explain, and George would apologize, and then they would be fine. That's the pattern. That's what happens between them. If Dream does something to hurt George's feelings, he waits for George to act strange, confront him about his behavior, figure out the real issue, and get to the bottom of it.

So George doesn't understand why Dream is acting like this. He wakes to an empty bed, thinks little of it. He brushes his teeth and makes his way downstairs to find Dream making breakfast for them. Mum sits pretty at the bar, a cup of coffee in front of her, half gone.

Their conversation cuts off as soon as he appears and George, once again, tries not to read into it. He knows they have secrets between them, and he's okay with that. He's forced himself to be okay with that.

"Hey," he says and sits himself next to Mum, leaning into her and soaking up her warmth. He's going to miss her terribly, now that they're repairing their relationship. And especially now that he's not sure she'll have anyone in England to catch her. Not like he has Dream. And Sapnap.

"Good morning, baby," Mum says, ruffling his hair. "I still can't believe you wouldn't let me cut this mop."

He shoos her off, "Hey, hey, leave me be."

Dream's face looks pinched. He doesn't even comment on George's hair. He always has an opinion on George's hair, an opinion George has solicited numerous times.

"Are you okay?" he asks before he can think better of it.

"What?" Dream doesn't meet his eyes, but he's cooking bacon so that's not too unusual, but it doesn't escape George's notice. "I'm fine, all good. Just telling Kate how much we'll miss her around here."

There's nothing to do but let it slide.

"How'd the recording go, by the way?" He asks both of them, "You never said after the stream."

"It went well, I think," Mum pipes up, an excited air around her that George wishes he were used to. Someday soon, he thinks. She'll be like this all the time.

"It did," Dream agrees, but doesn't elaborate. Another tick in the box of suspicious activity, but George doesn't push on it. Maybe he's going through something. As long as he's not like in love with George's mother, they'll be fine. Paranoia makes him look subtly between the two of them. He's not right? Not in love with George's mother? Because... honestly George would end it right here and now.

There's no way.

"Well, good," George says for lack of anything else to say. Normally, a conversation opener like that would take Dream thirty minutes to properly answer, leading them down another avenue and another until they've been in a call for sixteen hours and neither one of them want to leave.

George finds himself emotional when Sapnap pulls up to the curb. Without asking permission, George gets out of the car. Dream's already working on pulling the bags out of the Tesla's trunk. George stands in front of Mum and—

"I'm going to miss you, Mum," he says as she pulls him into a tight hug. It's a much different hug

than when they picked her up not seven days ago—just as concerned, but this time with context behind his concern, a connection between them renewed. Something that had been decaying in him for years brought to new life, a small sapling growing on the grave of his old relationship with her.

“I’ll miss you too,” she says into his ear. “But we’ll talk all the time now.”

“Yeah,” he says, “and you’ll be famous after Dream’s video comes out. I’ll probably have a hard time getting a hold of you.”

“I’ll have my assistant put you through,” she says against his temple before stepping away from him to look him over. “You’ll take care of yourself, yes?”

“Yes, Mum,” he promises, much like he did when she left him in Gatwick airport before the big move. He meant it then and he means it now. He won’t be something else she needs to worry herself over. She’s got her own problems these days. A bit of a reversal for him to be more worried about her.

“Well, now I don’t believe that, but I’ve got spies in the midst this time around,” she laughs, looking affectionately over to Dream, waiting like a big Golden Retriever for his own hug. “And I know Nick and Dream will help take care of you.”

He rolls his eyes, “I can take care of myself.”

“Then why don’t you?” she asks, an eyebrow raised at him, teasing lightly. “You’ll look after them, too, though, won’t you? I’ve grown quite fond of your boys.”

“They’re not *my boys*,” he lies.

“Yeah we are,” Dream admits, pushing George out of the way with a delicate elbow. He pulls Mum into a hug and Mum almost completely disappears in Dream’s embrace. “I’m going to miss you Kate.”

“You too, Dream. Thanks for being a friend. To my son and to me.”

“Like I told George, you NotFounds make it easy.”

She smiles indulgently at him and then over at George, runs a hand through his hair again. Then sticks her head in the window to say, “Bye Nick. Thanks for driving me, you’re not scary at all. I’m not sure why I got so many warnings.”

“Hey!” Sapnap says, lip turning down into a pout.

“Thank you for everything, guys.”

“Bye Mum,” George embraces her again, squeezing her extra hard. “You’ll call me as soon as...?”

“I’ll call you when there’s news to share,” she reassures him and then looks at Dream to share something, a look filled with meaning that he doesn’t understand. George lets it go. It’s between them and safe there.

He watches her go, suitcase behind her until a security guard not so politely asks him to go, that this is a loading zone only and they need to keep moving. Dream’s big hand pushes him gently into the front seat, grace and comfort in the touch, so different from his behavior the rest of the morning, and George sinks into shot gun. He plays hard rap loud enough that they can’t even pretend to talk to him.

He can't put it off any longer. When Sapnap and Dream precede him into the house, George looks down at his phone. There aren't many incoming or outgoing calls in the last week—everyone he talks to has been here. Quackity facetimed the other day and he missed a call from Karl, but it's a drastic difference from when he lived in the London flat.

His messages are lighter too. Instead of back and forths with Dream, now there's only imessage games from the other night, a log with wins and losses that not even his phone keeps track of anymore. Sapnap's texts are all calls to food—dinner, lunch, whatever meal is just because we're both up and awake and want to share food together.

Neve's messages are more sparse than usual. He's not surprised, she did warn him it's finals week. The worst timing for all their family drama. George doesn't want her to be blindsided, but he also doesn't want to distract her from her studies. This is her last semester of uni ever and he doesn't want to cause her undo stress or cause her to fail or anything because their parents might split up.

It's still up in the air!

He keeps telling himself that, sure that if she made a decision, that Mum would tell him. She's been open and honest, or at least with Dream. The line of communication is open. Dream would pass the message along if Mum made her decision. He's sure of it. He'd look at him with those sad eyes, but he'd tell him.

He sends Neve a quick text, wishing her good luck. Scrolling up, he reminds himself her last final is tomorrow. Then he can call her and let her know everything that's going on, commiserate on something only the two of them will ever truly understand.

George sighs. He flips back over to his call log and scrolls way down. God, he hasn't talked to his dad in forever. The last time Dad called was to ask for the wifi password for his new tablet since George set it all up for them while he lived there. What, like George just has it memorized? Still, he guided his dad to the taped up sticky note with the information on it, hidden on the inside of the tea drawer for safekeeping.

Has it really been that long since he's talked to his dad? Has he really missed anything, George wonders. That's an unkind thought, but a true one. Seems like the only thing he's missed is the possible end of his parents' marriage, the slow subtle slide into total separation.

He would have felt strange calling while his mum was in the house, but now there's no excuse.

The line rings once, twice, and a familiar, gruff voice answers on the third: "Hullo?"

"Hey, Dad," he says, wishing he had taken a second longer to figure out what he was going to say.

"You okay? What can I do for you, son?" Something bangs in the background and George wonders if he's out fixing the car, working on an engine, fine tuning. He spends more time in the garage than he does in their house.

And George can't even fucking drive.

"I'm okay. Was wondering about you, actually."

There's a long pause and no banging for a couple seconds. Something big clangs and George, with no knowledge at all about cars, can't picture what he just placed on his work bench. "Your mother told you, huh?"

Taken aback, George says, "Yeah, actually, um... she came to visit me. Stayed here for a bit."

"In America?" his dad asks, surprise evident in his voice. "She was serious about that?"

Oh so Mum did tell him. He just didn't listen or believe her. Did he even wonder where she was this week? If she was okay?

"Yeah, I just took her back to the airport. She's on her way home."

"Hmm, okay."

"Dad, are you okay? Can you tell me what's going on?"

"It's nothing that concerns you, George," his dad says coldly.

Not a new feeling while talking to his dad, George wants to rip his hair out, "Of course it does! You can't say this doesn't effect me and Neve, Dad."

"What happens between your mother and I is between her and I."

"Dad, what went wrong?" George is desperate. His life is crumbling down around him, things are falling apart, and no one will tell him anything. Mum told Dream, and that's—that's fine. Fine. It is. But now he doesn't know anything and things aren't looking good and, just—what does this mean for him?

"Not your business, kid," he's firm but this time he isn't cold. George heaves a big sigh, pushing all his frustration into the sound.

"Dad, I'm—" currently at a loss for words. "Sorry you're going through a hard time."

There, that's sufficient. It's true, at least. Duty fulfilled.

"Uh, thanks, I guess," his dad says. "How's, uh, America treating you?"

"It's good. It's not so much America I like but my friends are here, so..."

"Uh huh," the clattering sounds pick up again.

"But we did go to the beach the other day," George says, then adds lamely, "That was fun."

"Got a beach here in Brighton," something clangs extra loud in the background and George only half heard the remark, but the meaning wasn't lost. He restrains himself from sighing again.

"Have you told Neve anything about..."

"Not her business either."

"Okay, well—" he's at a loss for words now and very ready to end this conversation. There's

nothing to be learned here. All this is doing is making him angry. He remembers now why it's been so long since he's talked to his dad.

"I'll let you get back to work," his dad says, a bite in his voice that isn't new. "Programing or whatever you do these days."

Close enough. "Alright. Good luck with—" the line goes dead.

He's still not sure what he thought he was going to get out of that conversation, but at least now he can tell himself he tried.

George pockets his phone and walks inside.

"You okay?" Sarnap asks from the kitchen. He's leaning back against the counter, the last muffin on a plate in front of him. George was planning on eating that muffin. Better Sarnap does, it'd probably taste like sawdust in his mouth.

"Yeah," George says, banging his head on the island.

"Whoa," Sarnap springs into action, pulling George up by his shoulders and swirling him around to make eye contact. "Yo, don't hurt yourself. I can't stand for my Gogy to be in pain."

George wants to scream or cry or both. He settles for flinging his arms around Sarnap who catches him and falls into the hug easily. Sarnap's hug feels comforting. It's not Dream's embrace, nothing really could be, but after his mum, Sarnap's hugs are the best.

"What happened?"

"Called my dad," George leaves it at that.

Sarnap doesn't seem to know what to say or do and George can't blame him for that. Neither of them are comforting people. They go to each other for distraction, to forget about things and stir up trouble together. Leave the heavy emotional topics to Dream or Bad. Or maybe Karl, in Sarnap's case.

"Yo, you wanna build a blanket fort in the living room?"

"Absolutely."

George tears upstairs to grab the comforter off his bed, only to find Dream's already stripped the sheets. Or maybe Mum did, he's not sure. He didn't make it in here between waking and the airport.

No matter how strange Dream's acting, he's not getting out of this. George barges into his room to find it empty, the only evidence of George's residence the charger on the left side of the bed. After today, he's back to leaving no trace of himself in here. It's sad, he thinks, because he really enjoys this room. It's bigger. Decorated with more personality than George's room, his only touch the blue walls. Dream's room has pictures of his family on his dresser, the sand dollar George took from the beach, a couple really good fan drawings he couldn't resist keeping close, a little cat tower for Patches that she never uses and now serves to hold Dream's favorite hoodies. And the smell—it smells like Dream in here. Everywhere. George could breathe it in for the next century and never get over it.

He grabs the charger along with Dream's comforter. Damn, he loves that thing, and carries both Dream's covers and his own to the top of the stairs. He kicks them down, unwilling to walk

downstairs and risk braining himself on the steps when he inevitably trips over the bedding. That would be on Sapnap's conscience, he decides. George would haunt the shit out of him.

"What are you doing?" Dream's office door opens up, a blond head poking out.

"Blanket fort," George says with a shrug. "Sap's idea. Get in your pajamas and join us." George never changed out of his pajamas, even to take Mum to the airport. Now it seems like a win and less like laziness.

"George, I can't—" he says, only to be cut off by Sapnap yelling from downstairs.

"Hurry up, George! Dream, get your ass down here."

"I can't leave you two alone for five minutes without adult supervision," Dream looks up at the ceiling, drawing George's attention to the long line of his neck. He can't afford to think about that right now. George gives another kick to the blankets and watches them fall a few more steps.

"And bring Patchy if you see her," Sapnap yells again.

"Order food, idiot!" George yells back. "C'mon, he's not going to leave it alone."

"I was going to start the edit, I really shouldn't—"

"Dream," George says, exasperated. He really just wants to sit in a stupid fort with his best friends and forget about this day, forget about the bad conversation with his dad, forget about the way his life is changing around him. He doesn't want to be an adult with adult responsibilities today and he doesn't want his friends to be either. "Can you just... be a kid with us today?"

He must read George, the way only he ever seems to do, must see the resignation and the hope, and so Dream nods. "Okay."

"Okay?"

"Okay, let me change into pajamas. But Sapnap better not order anything stupid."

"Chicken and vegetables for your dry ass, we know," George says instead of thank you. Instead of telling Dream how much it means for him to shred his duties to the internet and come lose himself to childhood for just a few hours, he says this shit. But, hey, Dream knows what he means.

Downstairs, Sapnap has the bones of the fort ready to go, between the couch, the two barstools from the kitchen, and his gaming chair, they have tent poles. Dream spreads his navy bedspread over the television to make sure it's included, "So we can watch movies, otherwise, what's the point?" and George holds the other end, making sure it'll stay.

"Wait, I just remembered something," Sapnap says and takes off back to his room. They have long enough to exchange dubious looks before he comes tearing back into the living room with an unopened box of Christmas lights. "I forgot I bought these for cheap right after Christmas. Yo, this is gonna be lit."

The fairy lights lend a fantasy like air to the fort.

They can't decide on a movie so Sapnap sets up Mario Kart on the switch and they play for hours, competing and screaming and George loves it. This is another prime example of why he had to move here. Who else would do this with him? Let him play video games for hours under a brittle fort, sat between his two best friends, elbowing them on the final lap to try to get an edge over

them, dodging tickling fingers intent on doing the same to him. No questions asked, no excuses, just friendship under the navy blanket with fairy lights, looking like a safe version of the night sky where nothing and no one can hurt them.

Whatever was up with Dream seems to have resolved itself—he laughs with his whole body and elbows George back, targets Sapnap with red tortoiseshells exclusively, eats a bite of George's macaroni and cheese, and helps Sapnap coax Patches into the fort with catnip so they can get family photos of all of them together. He posts them to twitter and reads aloud the best replies until all three of them are crying with laughter.

George smiles so hard his face feels stuck.

Unspoken, they agree to sleep in the fort. Dream leaves to brush his teeth and turn off all the lights in the house. George guesses he'll probably come back with three bottled waters, too.

"You okay?" Sapnap asks when they watch the back of Dream's hoodie rush up the stairs, taking two at a time. "With whatever happened earlier, I mean?"

George turns his attention to Sapnap. He's a good friend. "Yeah, I'm better now."

"Want to talk about it?"

"Not really," George says because how can he put everything into words? He's not sure how much Sapnap knows about the entire situation anyway. He doesn't want to have to go over everything again. And something holds him back, doesn't want to disturb the serenity of the evening or ruin the moment with his real life problems. He came here to escape from those.

"Okay, cool," Sapnap says, "but you know you don't have to rely on only Dream, right? Like you can talk to me, too. Even if it's about him."

George looks away, fiddles with his blue switch controller. They let him have his favorite color even without using his disability as a reason for him to get his way. He doesn't know how to take what Sapnap's saying.

"Like, if he's annoying you or whatever," Sapnap adds and George is able to breathe again.

"He was acting a little off earlier," George admits, "but he seems back to normal now."

"Yeah," Sapnap agrees, "he did bond with your mom pretty tight, maybe he's just feeling weird about her leaving."

"Is it weird that they bonded so much?" George asks sincerely, "because she talked to him over me about, like, stuff."

Sapnap shrugs, "You know Dream. He sees someone in need or going through something and his protective instincts come out. And then for it to be your mom on top of that? He's like in love with you, of course he's going to go ape shit over your mom."

"He's not in love with me," George says right away, his face hot with all this heat trapped under the blankets, "Still, is it not a bit weird? Because I think it's a little weird. But I'm not, like, mad about it."

"Letting him do the emotional labor for your mom? Nah, that's definitely more his strength than yours. No offense."

“But should I have let him—I mean, he shouldn’t have to do that for my family.”

“If it’ll help your mom, why are you worried?”

“I don’t want to be unfair to Dream,” George says, feeling small. He lies down and throws the OU blanket over his face.

“You aren’t,” Sapnap says, “I’ll let you know if you are, don’t worry. Lord knows he wouldn’t ever tell you.”

“I know he won’t,” the blanket sits heavily on his face, muffling his words. It’s the only way he can say them, that maybe Sapnap can’t hear him, “sometimes I’m scared of how much he would do for me.”

“It’s not just him,” Sapnap kicks him lightly, “it’s all three of us, you know?”

George flips the blanket off his face to look at Sapnap. He means it. “Okay.”

Dream closes the fort flap behind him when he re-enters with three bottled waters and more pillows he dug up from somewhere. George gives himself a mental point for accurately predicting him.

“That’s my cue,” Sapnap says, “my turn to brush my teeth. Don’t strategize while I’m gone. Actually, doesn’t matter, I’ll still kick your asses.” He hops up and leaves, not bothering to leave the flap up. The only light comes from the fairy lights, the television long going dark due to disuse.

Dream places the bottle for Sapnap on his side of the fort, a small collection of Sapnap belongings spread out like a magpie’s nest—his phone, an empty bottle of water, his black switch controller, a protein bar wrapper. George likes that he left his mark here.

Lying down, George thinks their fort is surprisingly comfortable. He’s going to fall asleep easily tonight, no small part that Dream will be next to him, extending his time for one more day. It’s worth it. He’ll take it. He’ll take anything he can from Dream, for Dream.

“Hey,” Dream says after they’ve been quiet a minute. It’s not an awkward silence, they so very rarely are these days.

George throws his knee up, hitting Dream on the side. It drags a smile out of him.

“Are you done being weird?” George asks, not one for dancing around the issue any longer. He wouldn’t dare bring it up in the middle of the event, but now on this side when they’re through it? He can acknowledge it.

Dream lies down next to him, pulling his red controller out from under his back after a second. His face grimaces and George isn’t sure if it’s from the question or the controller. He won’t rule out that it’s both.

“Yeah, George,” he says, not even trying to deny it.

“Good,” George turns on his side to look at Dream, to see if he can read what the issue was about, like maybe it’s written in the wrinkles around his eyes, faint but there from the sun, from laughter, from a life well lived. “I missed you.”

“I was right here next to you,” Dream says, turning his neck to look over at George, eyes dark and gorgeous under the fairy lights.

His heartbeat picks up, always does this close to Dream's face. "Now you are."

"Not moving," Dream lets his leg brush George's, settling so that their sides are touching completely.

"Good. Don't."

With Dream next to him and normal again, George's mind wanders. With no distractions, he's unfortunately free to think about the day. He thinks back on the conversation with his dad. Did he handle it well? No. Obviously not. He's never come out of a talk with his dad confident he did well. They just have nothing in common. For a few precious years when George tried to care about football, they had a couple exchanges before things would fizzle out. But after George committed to tennis and gave up on football, whatever conversation about them as human beings and not like two humans who cohabit in the same space, dried up.

They'd talk about chores around the house, things George needed to do, his grades, warnings to avoid his sister when she fell into a mood, day to day things. George can't remember one conversation about why he fell in love with programming, just the one sided diatribes against the idea. How a business degree is more practical these days, more versatile.

And it burns George to know that his father never tried. Not like his mum, how she learned all his hobbies as a boy up until now. She let him down for a while, sure, but as of this trip, at twenty-five, she's still trying to understand him, see him. It's like Dream said, people who love you want to see you, want to see why you're into the hobbies you get into, see the value to you.

His dad's never done that. His dad's never offered to show George his own hobbies. He spent more time in that fucking garage than in the house. And maybe George never asked, either. But, fuck, his mum was right, though. He was the kid. It should have been on his dad to make that bridge. Now he finds he doesn't want one at all, doesn't feel like he's missing anything.

He's done, he decides. *He tried*. He reached out just to be pushed away again. Well, he can take a fucking hint. He has people who love him, and not just the millions online. He has friends who make sacrifices to spend time with him, who care about his day as well as his past, who want to learn from him and teach him in the same breath. His mum's words ring in his ears, she called Dream and Sapnap his family, said they formed a family here, and fuck if that's not the truth.

He's not going to keep sitting around, waiting for his dad to give a shit. Mum is enough. Neve is enough. Dream and Sapnap are more than enough.

"Dream?"

"Yeah?"

"Will you teach me to drive?"

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

This is my favorite chapter, I hope you like it too

When he wakes in the fort, he thinks this is the last time he'll have Dream's arms around him, the last time he'll feel Dream's rhythmic breath on his neck, the last time sleep would come so easy.

He awakens content, until the reminder that he's waiting on word from his mum brings him back down to earth. Sapnap's quiet snores fill the empty space inside the fort, too far away to share in the cuddling. George wonders if he fell asleep that way or if he naturally drifted away unconsciously. George spends close to an hour listening to the cacophony, until Dream wakes up.

Panicking, George fakes sleep, not wanting to be caught enjoying the embrace like a total weirdo. Dream gives his neck a gentle kiss and then lets himself out of the fort, Patches' meows following him into the kitchen for her breakfast.

George's heart doesn't stop hammering for ten minutes. He spends the time mourning the loss before packing it back in the box. Mum is gone, things have to go back to normal. The fort was a one off and now they're back to the Dream Team house life.

There's no news from Mum for the rest of the day, just a confirmation that she got in okay, no emergency landings or anything, which was not a concern of George's, whatever Sapnap might try to claim. Dream makes pancakes for dinner when George asks very politely, capitulating quicker than anticipated when met with George's 'please' eyes. Sapnap plays CS:GO with him online all day, letting George distract his brain. They're being nice to him and he hates it as much as he loves it.

He hates waiting for the other shoe to drop.

After Sapnap gives up and goes to bed, after George treats himself to a midnight snack, after the lights in the house are out—he's staring at the ceiling in his room. Back to this bullshit.

His bed is the same as it ever was, mattress firmer than Dream's, blankets that smell like a combination of himself and his mum's perfume leftover from her stay. Normally, he'd find that reassuring, but instead the smell lingering in the room serves as a reminder that things aren't settled.

Really, he's not sure why he's so messed up over this. It's dumb to feel like this. He lives in Florida. He doesn't see his parents. He already decided he's doing Christmas with Dream and Sapnap here this year, so he won't even go back to Brighton and see them then. It's not like he's a child and they'll fight over custody or anything if they decide to divorce. It's not like he'll be shuffled back and forth between two houses, never quite at home in either one.

He's a grown man, with a home of his own, responsibilities, a life here in the States. His parents' marriage doesn't effect him at all.

Then why does he feel like he's sitting on a tectonic plate and there's about to be an earthquake?

He thought they were fine! They were fine! Right?

He's seeing now that there wasn't a strong foundation for Mum and Dad.

If they can decide they don't love each other anymore, choose to purposefully cut the tethers between them—what's to stop them from doing that to George, too? What's to stop anyone from doing that to George? Those are the people that are supposed to love him the most, but that love is finite, comes with a time stamp, an expiration date.

Fuck this. George flips the covers off himself and strides down the hallway, mad at himself for being so weak, mad at Dream for making him weak, tired of his brain spinning in circles about things he has no control over.

The door swings open and that street lamp shines on Dream again.

He senses more than sees movement, eyes sensitive to the light after being in the dark for hours. Dream's voice is rough when he calls out, unsure, "George?"

"Yeah, it's me," and suddenly he feels shy and presumptuous.

"What's wrong?"

"Can't sleep."

"Oh, well, then c'mon," Dream lifts the covers up and scoots over, letting George have his side of the bed back. Like it's that easy. Like of course George can sleep there, like it's routine, expected. Like of course George belongs here next to him, even in sleep.

"This is your mattress' fault," he says because he can't say any of the other thoughts in his overactive brain. "'S too comfortable. Got used to it."

"Can't believe you made fun of me for researching mattresses. Look who's got a different opinion now."

"Shut up," he says and turns dramatically to put his back to Dream. "I hate you."

Dream picks up his hint, twisting up behind him—"Sure you do, George," and pulling George tightly against his chest. "Sure you do."

For the eighth day in a row, George sleeps in Dream's arms.

It doesn't matter that George never learned to drive in England, riding on the left side of the car and on the right side of the road is still surreal and feels wrong. Dream, true to his word, takes George to an empty parking lot outside of town and then talks him through everything. They film that part for a vlog, both hamming it up and over-exaggerating, but then George actually wants to learn and he can't focus on not killing them and being entertaining at the same time, so they turn the camera off and actually have a lesson.

Dream's an excellent teacher, kind where he needs to be, patient as hell, and funny enough to ease George's nerves. Plus he doesn't seem scared of dying, so that's a plus.

“You don’t have to stomp on the brake, George, a light tap will do,” Dream says, holding the handle above his right shoulder.

“Sorry,” George says for about the fifth time. It’s a process.

“S’okay,” Dream says, also for the fifth time. George has no idea how he can be this calm, George isn’t even the one teaching and he’s freaking out at himself. “Try it again.”

George’s foot eases off the brake, his hands sweaty on the steering wheel. He had to scoot the seat in by a lot for his feet to reach the pedals, Dream’s absurdly long legs basically stilts. No one’s legs are actually that long.

The car lurches forward ever so slowly and George observes the path in front of them is clear, no curbs or pedestrians, or god forbid other cars.

“Okay, now the gas, just lightly,” Dream instructs, sounding for all the world like he’s teaching Tina to MLG water in a low stakes video game and not like their lives are on the line with George operating a massive vehicle, the thing responsible for like most of the deaths in America or something. He’s not sure of the statistic, but it’s scary.

George eases them around the parking lot—it’s not the driving itself part he’s bad at, steering is just like MarioKart, isn’t it? Just an IRL video game. No, it’s the braking that’s hard, getting his foot to ease the car to a stop and not panicking and slamming on the brake until their seat belts catch them.

He follows Dream’s instructions to bring the car to a stop and then decides he’s had enough for the day. He puts the car in park and it only takes a moment to remember how, he’s watched Dream’s hands on the stick before, had to look away.

“Okay, I’ll drive us home,” Dream says, unbuckling himself and jumping out of the car. George tries to move the seat back, knowing those long legs aren’t going to curl into the space beneath the seat until he does. He doesn’t want to make things harder for Dream when he was so nice to teach him. Dream’s around the side of the car before he’s done, hanging off the open door. “Probably best to finish now anyway,” his gaze turns to the sky and George can see the clouds that have steadily been building throughout the day are finally starting to look scary. “I think she’s gonna pop soon.”

“Ugh,” George says in disgust. He gives up on the chair, Dream can do the rest. “Why do you have to say it that way?”

“What?” Dream asks, faux innocent.

George brushes past Dream to get out of the car, then slides into the passenger seat a second later. “Let’s go to McDonald’s. Buy me food.”

Dream rolls his eyes and they start a new round of bantering that takes them past one McDonald’s but into the drive through line of the second they pass. George’s burger tastes like victory.

Dream turns up the Ariana Grande song on the radio just to make George dry heave and then he feels the tell tale buzz of an incoming message.

“Oh,” he says when he sees who the text is from. Something shifts inside him. Here’s the other shoe. Dream turns the music down again, concerned. “Mum said she’s going to call in an hour.” That gives them enough time to get home and for him to get situated. As much as Dream is in all this, George needs to take this call alone.

“Are you ready for that?” Dream asks, eyes looking up through the windshield to track the first droplets of the storm.

“I’ll have to be.”

George doesn’t remember ending the call. Maybe he said goodbye, maybe he didn’t. All he knows is that he feels like he’s no longer inside his body. The storm rages outside. Flashes of lightning, angry through the sliding glass door call to him. Rain doesn’t happen like this in England, like the sky is pouring a bucket of water out onto the poor souls living below, like a punishment.

He can’t sit here any longer.

Hands slide the door open, and bare feet step onto the patio. It’s not enough. The feet carry him into the grass, squelching between his toes in another life would disgust him. His white shirt clings to him, the rain seeping further down into his sweats and his boxers.

He can’t cry, no tears will come. Raindrops slip down his cheeks anyway, indistinguishable. Thunder roars above him and he wants to scream into the night, answer the call back, wake up the heavens with the might of his rage. It’s not fair.

It’s not fair.

“George?” he hears a familiar call from the house and the turmoil inside reacts to that voice, that tone. It bubbles up, almost waving at his presence.

He doesn’t turn around. He can’t. He can only look at the sky and take a deep breath of petrichor and salt from the far away ocean. One after another.

He comes anyway, George knows he would.

“What are you doing out here?” Dream asks, barely loud enough to make out over the storm.

George has trouble containing himself, his chest heaving, goose bumps raising on his bare arms from the chill in the rain, the first time he’s been cold in Florida, truly cold.

“George,” Dream says when he doesn’t respond. He walks up behind George, tentatively, and George hates it. Hates the caution he inspires, hates that gulf between them that’s entirely George’s creation.

“They’re getting a divorce,” he says plainly. Dream deserves to know. He’s befriended George’s mother like he does with so many, carved a space in her heart like he did to George, like he’s done to millions of people. But he cares for her, too. He reassured her when George couldn’t, when he fell short as a son. Dream stepped in and provided support for George’s family. He’ll always be grateful to him for that, amongst many things.

“Oh,” Dream slowly lowers a hand onto George’s shoulder, unsure of his reception. Doesn’t he know he’s always welcome? Too welcome. George aches for his touch, craves it like an alcoholic will always crave alcohol, is always one bad day away from relapse. George wants it, wants it,

wants it, wants more, never enough. “I’m sorry, George.”

He doesn’t understand. Dream doesn’t.

He turns into Dream, looks up at him, searchingly.

“It’s not the divorce part,” George manages to say, struggling for the words, trying to conjure the right combination of them to explain what’s making him feel like this—what eldritch horror churned his ocean and generated these tsunamis.

“Okay,” Dream says, always patient. So patient, so kind, standing here with George in a thunderstorm, rainwater turning his gray shirt dark and making his blond hair stick to his head.

“He already has someone,” George explains. The water is freezing now, slipping down his back and hands, making rivulets across his skin. “My dad. Mum didn’t know. He didn’t tell her before.”

Dream’s as surprised as he is, “Really?”

“Yeah, he—” another loud crack of thunder. That’s why he’d been so fucking weird on the phone, weirder than usual. Cagey.

“And you’re mad he cheated on your mom?” Dream tries to guess when George cuts himself off, when George fails to find the words. Dream always tries to fill in the blanks for him, he can’t stop, always trying to figure George out, greedy for more.

He shakes his head, water droplets disappearing back into the sheets of rain. “That’s not it,” he says because it’s not. Yeah, George doesn’t love that Dad already has someone in mind, but he can’t say he’s surprised at that part, truly. There had to be a spark somewhere, to light the entire family up—ten years of monotony for his parents doesn’t get upended without a catalyst. He’s seen enough Bonfire nights to know the biggest logs won’t burn without that initial spark, much lower down in the kindling.

“Then, what’s got you like this, Georgie?” Dream asks, bringing one of those big hands up to George’s cheek, brushing it so delicately, softer than a butterfly’s kiss. It makes George want to weep, want to reach down and tear out the grass, or reach into his own heart and pluck it for Dream, hand it over to him because he can’t be trusted with it apparently, letting it break all the fucking time.

“It’s not fair,” George says. Dream doesn’t respond, he brings his hand around to the back of George’s head and George lets it fall back, lets Dream support him. He had no idea how heavy his head was. He closes his eyes and tilts his head further up into the sky, lets the water fall off his face.

A clap of thunder booms so loudly he can feel it in his chest—it feels good. He wants to feel it again.

“It’s not fair!” he screams into the sky, booming back thunder of his own. “Why does he get to have it again?!”

Dream steps impossibly closer, supporting more of George’s body while he yells at the sky.

“He already got years and years with Mum and when he decides he’s done, he what, just gets to have another go with someone else, someone who—” he gulps in air, his chest painful, he can only say this with his eyes still tightly shut, “who already loves him? Ready to pick up the role of ‘husband’ again with a different actress? It’s bullshit!”

It's selfish is what it is. Dad doesn't care who he drowns, who suffers for his decisions, it's not a choice George will let himself make. And here's the template—choose yourself over everyone else and it's everyone else who suffers. He sees it in glaring color now. He was right to hold himself back, keep his emotions in check, if this is the fall out.

"I don't get to have that," George whispers one of the precious few secrets he's ever kept from Dream. It's his now, to do with it what he wants. "I'll never get to have that. I *can't* have it."

"What do you mean?" Dream asks, his hands and chest the only warmth George knows. "You can have that, George."

"No, I can't," he says and he knows it, knows it to his bones. It's a tenant in who he is. George has too many emotions, too many feelings. If he's constantly on the verge of drowning in them himself, what would he do to someone else? Drag them down into his abyss until their lungs scream for oxygen, until the life giving air in their lungs becomes his water and they fucking drown. That's what he does. He won't do that to anyone else. Better not to risk it.

"Yes, you can," Dream argues and George can't look at him, can't look at the blazing look he knows will be in his eyes. He shakes his head, like rejecting it enough will keep it true.

"You'd be so easy to love, George," Dream offers up, like it's the simplest thing in the universe to say. "You *are* so easy to love. If you would just open yourself up to it."

That eldritch monster returns for round two and splits George asunder—the gaping wound spilling guts and sinew everywhere, along with those emotions he keeps wrapped up so tightly. They pour out like an oil spill, muddy, and dangerous and flammable. Dream's chest catches him and George sobs.

George sobs like he never has in his entire life. He can't control himself, he's beyond capacity. He soaks Dream's shirt with more than the Florida storm, with tears and snot and spit and every part of himself he's been scared for Dream to see. The ugly kind of crying, the kind that answers to a higher power than self-control. Dream encloses him in a tight hug, preventing George's fists from banging against him, holding him together, keeping his organs on the inside of his body where they belong.

"You're okay," Dream tells him, hands brushing up and down his back, the only thing keeping George from freezing solid, thawing him. "You're okay."

He's not sure how long he cries. Not as long as the storm carries on. Not long enough to find the bottom of Dream's patience for him. He thinks Dream would stand in this storm propping him up all night if George asked him to. He won't ask, though.

His pulse calms, his breaths even out and his pounding head is eventually the only physical evidence of his breakdown. The wound, though, still oozes. That will take a little longer to heal, time and care. He needs to sew it back together, prevent anything else from coming out tonight. But something tells him it's already too late for tonight.

"You're freezing," George says finally cognizant enough to feel Dream shaking against him.

"So are you."

"I'm sorry," George tells him, bodies still entangled.

"Don't be," Dream says into his ear, "Let's get out of these wet clothes, hmm? Let me take care of you."

Let me take care of you. Dangerous.

But George *wants*.

“Okay,” his tongue takes its orders from the wound instead of his better sense and he lets himself be pulled along by Dream, through the sliding door, up the stairs to Dream’s room. He doesn’t question why they don’t go to his own room, of course they’re going to Dream’s. They fit here, both of them.

Inside the room, Dream closes the door with care. It doesn’t escape George’s notice that he did that for George, knows about his thing for closed doors, that he’s closing the door with Dream on this side of it. George doesn’t complain.

They move to the en suite wordlessly. Dream turns on one set of lights, and George is grateful, doesn’t think he can stand the harsh overhead light. Instead, he prefers the soft glow of the vanity.

Dream strips his shirt off and then his trousers. George stares, how can he not? Dream makes use of the home gym, his body tight in all the right places. George’s felt those muscles against his body, many times. He’s been held by those powerful arms and nuzzled into those pecs, ran his hand down Dream’s stomach looking for ticklish spots to no avail. He’s let that thigh spread his own in their sleep, found himself wishing he could push back against it.

Dream doesn’t notice George’s appraisal, or if he does he ignores it. He turns the shower on, letting it run warm but not hot. Then he turns to George and looks expectantly at him. George can read Dream too well to not know what he’s asking for. He raises his arms, another wound order that his brain doesn’t get to veto, and Dream gently pulls the wet shirt off his skin.

With his shirt out of the way, George feels lighter. He didn’t realize how heavy the shirt became in the downpour. Dream leans in front of him to pull his trousers off and George balances himself with a hand to Dream’s bare shoulder. These shoulders can take a lot—his own controversies, gigantic expectations, they can handle holding George up.

Dream tugs from the bottom of the trousers, and they slip off. He stands almost naked in front of Dream and he isn’t scared. Dream checks the water temperature and finds it acceptable. He seems to pause, think something over and come to a conclusion, the kind of quick thinking he’s known for and then to George’s surprise, pulls his briefs down.

If George had more heat in his body, he’d blush. Dream’s angled enough that George can’t see anything except his butt, and that’s impressive enough. He looks up just in time to avoid Dream catching him.

“You coming in?” Dream asks, one eyebrow raised in a quiet dare. George knows he won’t tease him if he keeps his underwear on, probably won’t ever bring any of this up unless George does, but still George can’t resist a dare from Dream, can’t back down from a challenge when it’s issued, can’t let Dream win.

With more bravery than he thinks he has, George pushes his boxers down and steps out of them, all without breaking eye contact. He’d have to get out of them before he put new clothes on anyway. It feels right to stand bare for Dream, to be seen, to be cleansed by him. To put himself in Dream’s hands and know he’ll come out better, that he can step back and let Dream handle it.

“Yeah,” George lets Dream guide him into the shower, lets his body follow Dream’s into the warmth. The heated water makes him shiver harder, somehow, but it feels amazing. Refreshing.

They spend a few minutes just enjoying the warmth, catching each other's eyes and exchanging shy smiles. Dream grabs a bottle from the shelf and shampoos his hair. Once he's done and has rinsed it out, he pulls George closer and proceeds to wash his hair too. Fingers digging into his scalp and the reassuring smell of Dream around him has George more relaxed than he can remember being, and a little turned on. He hopes Dream doesn't notice.

Dream doesn't stop with shampoo. He pulls a bottle out from behind another one, pours a small amount into his hands, and then runs it through George's hair, a strong smell of chamomile clouding them. He only uses the leftovers for his own hair, a pittance. George doesn't bother with conditioner on his own, unless it's part of a 2-in-1 deal that he's been bullied into not using anymore.

It feels good. When Dream rinses it out and George runs a hand through his damp hair, it's smooth. He doesn't get caught on any tangles. Dream follows it up with eucalyptus body wash, soaping up George's arms and chest, leaving everything below his waist to George while he takes care of himself quickly. George lets the smell seep into his pores, lets it soothe him as much as Dream's fingers have. He hasn't felt this clean in ages. Dream gets out first to procure towels, waving a blue one around George with a proud look on his face.

"C'mere," he says, gesturing for George to step into the towel in his arms. George turns off the shower and then doesn't let himself think about it, he walks back into the cradle of Dream's arms unselfconsciously. The towel gently runs up and down all his limbs, drying him quickly. Dream skips his hips and George thanks him silently, he doesn't need his half chub acknowledged.

Dream lets George wrap the towel around his waist while he dries himself off, aggressive with his hair. Dream leads him back into the bedroom and pushes him to sit on the nicely made bed, opening drawers to find clothes for them.

He places a pile next to George on the bedspread and comes to stand in front of him. George has to tilt his head back sharply to see Dream's face. Suddenly, he's exhausted. He doesn't want to move. He's warm, he feels cared for, he's safe.

"I meant it when I said you'd be so easy to love, George," Dream tells him, voice low enough to punch George in the gut. His hand reaches out and lands on George's cheek, eyes blazing and hypnotic. George can't look away, doesn't even want to.

George is just a man—a fallible, weak, man like any other. How can he sit here in front of Dream and not want him? With his walls stripped away as surely as his clothes, he has no natural defense to a Dream looking like this, looking at him like this. The last vestiges of sanity break in George and he speaks across the distance.

"Show me what it's like, Dream," he leans into Dream's hand, eager for more of his touch, yearning to know for sure what it feels like to have Dream love him like that, like a partner and not just a friend, the way George has felt for Dream for ages, tucked away in his neat little box. "Just for tonight, show me."

Those green eyes don't leave, but just for a moment, they falter, "George, I'm not sure..."

"Just... please, Dream," his voice barely even sounds like him, he's never heard himself like this, so desperate, so vulnerable, he hates it. There's no one else he'd ever let see him like this, but he knows he's safe with Dream, safe in Dream's heart, safe in Dream's arms, under him and over him, there's nothing he could do to hurt George. "Just tonight, please. I—I need it."

"George are you sure you know what you're asking me?" Dream's eyes are the most serious

they've ever been, flecks of brown in the green around his blown out pupils. George knows what he's asking, what he's daring to put forth to Dream, ask him to meet him halfway, ask him to indulge with him, ask him to love him. It's a request he never thought he'd dare ask.

"Only one person can show me what it's like," George says and he believes that. There's only one person who's ever treated him close to—only one person who could convince George.

A terrible thought then occurs to George, "I mean, if you even..." because what if all this has been in his head? What if he's just seeing what he wants to see? What if Dream is just being nice? George's face burns so hot and he tears his gaze away from Dream, ready to simply die from embarrassment. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to assume you—oh, god, I—"

"It's not that I don't want you, George, c'mon," Dream says chidingly, like he's already a step ahead in their dance. And, who knows, maybe he is. George heaves a sigh of relief, glad to know it's not just him here, alone. He's glad they're in this together. For how long, he doesn't know. He doesn't really even know how long it's been on his side, that he'd want something like this, not that he'd ever ask or accept it.

"Then, please, Dream. Just for tonight."

"Are you sure we can—are you sure it won't ruin anything?"

"I'm sure," George finds himself saying. And he means it. "Nothing can ruin you and me. It's you and me." Because George won't let anything ruin them. George will hold tight to Dream's friendship, they're braided together at this point. He can't be George without Dream's friendship. He won't let anything ruin that, even himself. He can handle a night. Just one. He wants to know what it's like, what he's missing. What his dad and so many others ruin lives to experience.

"George," Dream says, still hesitant.

"I want to feel something good, Dream. Please make me feel good."

"Okay," Dream says like he's deciding something more for himself, "Okay. You wanted to know what it's like to feel loved? I can do that. I'll give you that tonight."

Dream pushes George back on the bed, encourages him to lie down in the middle. George goes obediently, dragging Dream with him, over him, unable to separate. The air conditioning and the fan Dream keeps running in the room started to cool him off, but Dream heats him up all over again, delicious warmth spreading over him from every point they're touching.

"If I were someone who loved you," Dream's face swims in George's vision, and it's everything. He licks his lips, wanting nothing more than Dream's on his, "then I'd probably do this." Dream doesn't make him wait long. He dips down, busses his nose against George's with a sheepish smile. It's so cute George wants to stay in this moment forever, except that then he'd miss what happens next.

Dream kisses him. At first, he's soft with it—lips and tickling stubble, smelling like his shampoo and something so Dream that no cologne could ever duplicate it. George's eyes drift closed of their own volition. All he knows is Dream's touch—his lips on George's mouth, his body settling above George's, coarse towels against George's skin, but, oh their chests press together and George sighs into Dream's mouth.

Dream pulls back, looks him over. George knows what he wants, gives it freely, "That was good, Dream. You're so good at that."

“Yeah?” he rubs his hand against George’s cheek. George doesn’t understand the fascination, but it’s becoming more common, “Another one?”

George strains upward to reach him, and this time he tentatively licks into Dream who accepts him, meets him, falls headlong into this kiss with him. It’s never felt like this before. George pushes the thought from his mind, he knows he’ll dissect every angle at a later date, knows he’ll pinpoint this as the moment he knows he’s screwed. There’s not another human on the planet who can make him feel like this, just Dream.

Whatever fumbblings he’s had before, they are nothing to this. He’s not surprised, something deep in him knew it would be this way. That Dream can’t do anything by halves and that the two of them together would be explosive. Only Dream.

Just Dream putting his entire heart on the line, offered up to George simply because he asked. Overcome with emotion, George pulls off to take a deep breath. Dream shifts lower, mouth moving to his neck where that tongue continues to reshape his entire world. Because he’s Dream and he’s like this, he finds a spot on George’s neck that travels straight to George’s dick, making it pulse, demand attention.

Like he can hear it, Dream rubs one muscular thigh against George. He moans, he can’t hold it in. “That feel good?”

“So good, Dream,” he answers, shameless, “more.” Laughing, Dream retreats, to George’s dismay, only to come back with his dick pressed against George’s through their towels, and oh, okay, this is better actually. George grinds upwards, mindless in his pursuit of pleasure, his hands traveling to Dream’s hair to pull on it, ask him to hurry, for more, more, more...

But Dream takes his time, not one to be rushed. He spends what feels like hours on George’s neck, his clavicles, nipples, belly button, until George feels his touch on every atom of skin above his waistline, like the deer trails he’s made in George’s skin will deepen, widen, until they’re permanent parts of George’s chest.

Dream sits back, and stupidly, George already misses him. He stares down and George feels raw, open for inspection. He hopes Dream likes what he’s seeing. A hand reaches down to the towel separating them and tugs lightly, “Can I?”

“Yours, too,” George says because he’s burning to see Dream, to feel him fully. He wants to know all of Dream in this moment, wants nothing held back. Dream throws George’s towel towards the bathroom hamper, missing by a mile.

“Nice shot, idiot,” he can’t help but say because this is them. They can’t do serious without levity, at least George can’t. Dream shakes his head, amusement evident.

“I get another chance,” he says, pulling his own towel clean off his body. George’s eyes almost fall out of his head. God, Dream’s gorgeous. Even his fucking dick is nice. George would be more mad if he wasn’t about to use it to his advantage.

He hits the hamper this time. “Kobe,” Dream says, all laughing green eyes and arrogant smirk. George can’t stand it, he sits up and kisses it off his face. If George can’t do serious, than Dream can’t miss a chance to show off for him.

Dream pushes him back, keeping their mouths connected. Where did he learn to kiss like this? George’s head spins and his stomach dances with butterflies. Dream’s dick feels huge and hot against him, the friction between them heavenly. If they keep it up, George can come from this.

Certainly he can come from this. In fact, he might—

“I’m gonna come,” he says, eager for it, ready to fall into oblivion, but Dream snaps his hips away taking the orgasm with him.

“No,” he whines, grabbing at Dream’s shoulders to try to convince him to come back, give in.

“Here, roll over,” Dream says, nudging George’s side. He does so, utterly confused. It’s pure instinct to give Dream what he wants, to follow what he tells him to do. He blames the lust, George doesn’t ever snap to orders, not even from Dream.

“What are you—” George asks, as Dream presses kisses down his spine, leaving tingles in his wake. He grinds into the mattress unconsciously as Dream descends lower and lower. George has one guess on where this is going. It’s so intimate, his face burns in mortification and excitement. He’s never let anyone *there*, and he’s not sure if should let Dream.

“If I were someone who loved you,” Dream lays kisses reverently on George’s back, right above his ass, waiting for permission or hyping himself up, George’s isn’t sure, but he’s desperate for Dream to just touch him, give in, “I’d want to do this,” he pulls George’s cheeks apart. There’s no mistaking what he’s planning, where he wants to go. George shudders in anticipation, he wants it so badly, wouldn’t even consider this with anyone else, wouldn’t be able to let anyone else look at him like this, let alone give him pleasure. “I’d want you to feel as loved as you are.”

George can barely breathe, let alone speak. His chest can’t take any air deeply and it’s making him deranged, rabid enough to push himself backwards, encourage Dream to get on with it. He needs it. Dream always gives him what he needs.

“Do you want me to, George?” Dream asks, voice liquid gold and hands kneading him like George is the one who needs encouragement.

“Please,” he manages to say, “Yes, please, I—”

“You’re sure?” Dream asks, always so careful with him. Always so respectful of his boundaries, even when George doesn’t want him to be. When he wants him to just take, bulldoze over them, not give George the chance to think himself out of what he wants.

“Dream,” he pushes his hips back, asking with his body for what he craves. “Dream, please.”

Dream huffs a laugh and it’s so sexy George wants to curl up. He’s almost glad he can’t see Dream’s face right now, that sexy laugh and his face would be too much. George’s life would end. “God, your ass is so perfect, George. I can’t believe I get to eat you out. I’m so lucky.”

“You’ve been so subtle—”

George doesn’t have a chance to feel self-conscious, to consider their position for too long, Dream’s tongue gets right to work. He feels the wet slide of Dream against his hole and he *keens*. Dream’s hands hold his hips down and he plows further in, the strangest sensation George has ever felt, but the most welcome.

His hips, restrained as they are, move in small circles against the sheets below him, pushing back as much as he’s allowed onto Dream’s tongue, both ends giving him so much pleasure, almost too much. This isn’t going to take very long.

“Dream,” he says without even meaning to—his whole world right now is Dream: Dream’s tongue, Dream’s hands, Dream’s body over his, Dream Dream Dream...

“Do you like it?” Dream asks, taking in deep bouts of air before he dives back in. What a stupid question. Something wiggles at the back of his mind, swimming through the haze of pleasure, he can almost—oh.

“Yeah,” George tells him, “Feels so good. You’re doing so good, Dream.”

Dream moans behind him, the vibrations dovetailing into the pleasure. George hasn’t ever been this hard in his life. He’s going to bust right here and now.

“Feel so good for me, Dream.”

He falls over the precipice, head first, no parachute. His back bows, eyes roll back in his head and George comes harder than he ever has, voice screaming, toes curling, absolute oblivion. He has no idea how long it lasts, but it feels like a lifetime and not nearly long enough.

“Dream,” he manages to say when he comes down, “Dream.”

“Yeah?” his voice is tight and that’s not right.

“Dream, want you to come,” he pushes his hips back again, an open invitation. He’ll take whatever Dream wants to give him. “Want you to feel as good as you made me feel.”

“George, can I...?”

“Anything,” George says and means it. If Dream wanted to fuck him right here and now, George would let him, would deal with the consequences tomorrow. He has lube somewhere in his room. He hasn’t searched this room, but Dream might have some around.

“Not going to last long,” Dream says, bringing his dick to George’s ass crack. He thrusts against him through his own saliva and moans gently into the air behind George. George regrets not being able to see Dream’s face now, wants to watch the pleasure cross over those now familiar features. He turns his head awkwardly, trying to see him as much as possible. Dream rubs a couple more times against him, then takes himself in hand and with a couple strokes, comes beautifully over George’s ass, spend hot against his skin that was cooling in Dream’s spit.

“George,” Dream says, falling forward on top of George who welcomes him. “Oh my god, George. Fucking life altering.”

“I know,” he says back, sleepiness starting to overcome him now that he’s orgasmed. After the emotional toll and coming his brains out, George can’t handle more of this day. “I know.”

Dream breathes against George’s neck, heavy against his back but manageable for now. After a moment, Dream jumps up and disappears back into the bathroom. George isn’t bothered, he knows Dream’s taking care of him, of both of them. He hears the water running and the sounds of teeth brushing echo into the room.

Sure enough, Dream re-emerges with a wash cloth and then cleans his spend off George’s back, smeared a bit where Dream collapsed on him. George turns over onto his back to look at him and watches silently as Dream takes a second to clean himself and paw at the dirty comforter under George. His cock, even soft, is impressive. George wants it again and again and again. Wants it in his mouth, wants it up against his ass again, wants it between his thighs, he wants every depraved thing he’s never let himself think about before.

The bed dips when Dream joins him again, crawling under the covers, the clothes he put out for George long ago fallen to the floor. George scuttles under the comforter too. He cuddles close to

Dream's chest, the open air making him cold again with no barriers. Everything in him needs to be close to Dream right now, to be safe, cared for. Nothing can hurt him when he's in Dream's arms. Not even himself.

"Did it work?" Dream asks in a whisper and George shoots him a confused look. Dream reaches down and places the gentlest kiss on his eyelid, and then the other. "Did you feel it?"

His eyes burn into George's, telegraphing every thought he's ever had. They're all open for George. It's scary. It's humbling. "I can try again."

"Yeah, Dream," he breathes into Dream's neck, trying in vain to ignore the drop in his stomach, "Yeah I felt it."

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

A conversation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The kitchen the next morning is bumping—Sapnap and Dream are blaring music when George finally enters, surprised the volume didn't wake him sooner. His head still aches from all the crying he did yesterday, but his body is loose. He missed Dream when he woke up alone, still lying naked under the covers but cold without another body to trap heat under their navy blankets.

Dream's eyes light up when he notices George sitting at the island. The music is too loud for a greeting, but his smile says everything anyway. It's a shy thing, sweet, and private, it speaks of all the intimacy between them yesterday. George returns the smile, how can he not?

"Fuck this town and like everyone in it!" Sapnap sings, missing the exchange between his best friends. George breaks eye contact with Dream to study Sapnap. He should be studied by like actual scientists. What a little freak. George adores him.

Like he can sense a shift in the mood, Sapnap grabs his phone and changes the song. A loud techno beat bursts out and George doesn't recognize the song.

"Dance, Dream," Sapnap says, pretending to throw dollar bills at their fearless leader. "Dance!"

George joins in, pretending to make it rain on a Dream who hasn't moved, until he and Sapnap are both pelting Dream with invisible notes. "Come on, Dream!"

Dream rolls his eyes and then throws it back. George almost falls out of his chair, and not because it's sexy. It's the farthest thing from sexy, it's a white boy, with no ass, who can't twerk to save his life, shaking that ass at his friends. Sapnap and George roar with laughter and Dream doubles down, hands on his knees and going all in. George's chest aches he's laughing so hard, tears forming in his eyes.

When Dream straightens up, teasing the bottom of his shirt at his captive audience like he's going to strip it off, George calls a stop to the whole thing. It's not that he doesn't want to see that. He wants to see that so bad, no matter how many times he already has. He doesn't want Sapnap to see that. That's for him.

Well, it's not, but George feels like it is. Wants it to be.

"Okay, okay," George says, waving his hands around, "we get it, you're desperate for cash. We know you're actually broke."

"Only because he spent all his money on like golden toilet paper for his Gogy," Sapnap sneers while he turns the volume back to a normal level, "so you don't have to wipe your ass with anything less than the highest standard."

“Well, I mean,” Dream says, voice arrogant and in the tone that warns George of danger, “George’s ass is worth it. I mean, have you seen it?”

Memories of last night play out in George’s mind, his ass tingles thinking of Dream pleasuring it, the way he took George apart with so little effort. Embarrassment or something akin to it races along George’s back and his face flushes hot.

“I have not,” Sapnap announces, “Nor do I want to, you freak.”

“Sorry I have taste,” Dream says, eying George like he’s trying to plant the memories back into his brain, like he’s making sure George is thinking of the same thing. It’s a wasted effort. George won’t be thinking of anything else for at least, oh, the rest of his goddamn life.

“The best taste,” Dream adds, clearly not talking about himself. Dear lord, he’s thinking of his tongue in George’s ass. Suddenly the barstool isn’t very comfortable.

“So are you guys cooking something or do I need to order food?” George says, desperate to change the subject.

Dream smirks, but goes with it. “I can cook, what do you guys feel like?”

“Not pancakes,” Sapnap says. “I’ve overdosed on pancakes.”

“Not pancakes,” Dream says, pointing at Sapnap like he’s on a game show, “Got it. Any other very helpful suggestions?”

“Sausage, maybe,” Sapnap says like Dream didn’t say anything at all.

“You’re done with cake and now you want sausage?” Dream asks, shaking his head like he’s disappointed. “I know my cake isn’t as good as George’s, but—”

“Oh my God,” Sapnap rages, looking like he’s about to pull his hair out, “shut up about George’s ass. What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

His face has never been as hot as it is right now. Aliens on the moon or whatever are going to spot this blush. “Dream,” he says, hoping he’ll pick up on the need for a subject change.

“Ugh, you two are no fun.”

“We’re plenty fun,” Sapnap opens the fridge, “you’re just lame.”

“So lame,” George agrees and Dream sends him a fake hurt look.

“Don’t go breaking my heart, George,” Dream says and—

His spine straightens. There’s something in the way Dream says that, like there’s no world in which George hurts him, where George actually causes him anguish and George, all at once, remembers the end of the night before he fell asleep. When he knew in his heart, soul, and mind that Dream is in love with him.

Dream, beautiful, kind, passionate Dream. George will ruin him.

That’s what George does.

He’s too much, always been too much.

This is why he doesn't open that box.

His feelings are bigger than other people's, he realized that as a kid when Jonathan from down the street stomped on the pill bugs they took all afternoon to gather. He realized that when Mufasa's death made him cry every time he watched it, no matter how many times he's already seen it and no matter that he knew it was coming. He realized that when the first boy he ever looked at differently than his peers looked at other boys told him he was disgusting.

George's feelings are too much and he's always known they were too much. He looks over at Dream, tall and broad in their homey kitchen, shoveling out Patches' cat food and talking a mile a minute about the video he recorded and how editing is going. He's a pioneer. He's doing things on the internet that no one has done before, blazing trails from spaces that George would never look at and think could make a path. Dream's redefining Youtube videos with his artistic eye for editing and head for business.

George can't be the one to hold him back.

George can't let the waves of desperate love George has for him drag him into the void, sink him and then crush him under the pressure of the deep ocean, where light won't shine. Dream is a being of light, made for it. Made to revel in it and made to exude it for others.

He has to be strong for Dream. He has to be the one to not let them go there. He can't lose Dream's friendship if it's never at risk.

He can't risk waking up one day to a world where Dream chooses not to love him anymore, where he realizes George isn't worth it. It happened to his parents, it can happen to anyone.

Decision made, George's mouth dries supernaturally. His eyes burn and his heart hurts. He closes in on himself, locking everything down in the box. This time, there's more added in there— Dream's skin against his, the adoration in those green eyes, the smell of them together on the navy bedsheets. It all has to go. He can't be distracted by thoughts like those.

Sausage sizzles on the stove, Sapnap standing over the pan with a spatula and poking at the meat, his tongue between his teeth in concentration. George looks at him, why couldn't he be attracted to Sapnap? Sapnap wouldn't consume him. Sapnap would make him feel good and they would have fun together. And George knows his world wouldn't implode if Sapnap decided to end things. He could go back to being friends with Sapnap. He sighs. Sapnap isn't Dream.

"One or two, George?" Sapnap asks, like it's not the first time he's asked the question. He's not hungry anymore.

"Never mind, I don't want to eat."

Dream's eyebrows furrow and his gaze is all concern and study. George shrinks under his scrutiny and slides off the stool. He can't be here any longer.

"I'm going to stream," he tells them. He needs to talk to Quackity.

Quackity agrees to stream with him, but complains about the studying he's missing out on the entire time. It's so annoying, he should just drop out. George respects that Quackity wants to graduate, but he's making millions of dollars doing this right now. Why can't he go back to school later?

It's not like George is using his degree. Except that he does use computers all the time, but whatever. He doesn't need his fancy degree to make Minecraft plug ins.

Bad joins the stream thirty minutes in and George sits back and watches Bad and Quackity erupt in chaos, bouncing back and forth between Rat and "Language!" until George's head spins. He eggs them both on, knowing that the second this gets old, the second he ends stream, he has to think about things again. Dream is just waiting on the other side of the door. Not like literally, he doesn't have a glass up against the door trying to hear in. If he wanted to do that, he could just watch the stream.

And he's not. George checked.

Bedwars gets old when they can't work together to win. Like, at all. Tina joins to round them out as a team and instead of a calming presence, she goes in just as hard as them. Between George, Tina, and Quackity, the stream devolves into who can be more annoying on the GOXLR. It's a close game.

Chat asks about his mum, asks about what they've been up to. He wasn't very active online while she was in town and ended stream pretty quickly after her prank last time he ran around his hard core world. It was difficult to wrangle chat when they were exploding in hilarity at him. He also ran out of the reason he wanted to stream in the first place, distraction while Dream and Mum were off recording and talking more about god knows what. Dream hasn't finished the edit or let George see any of the footage.

He ignores the questions about Mum. They'll see her soon enough in Dream's video and he doesn't want to spoil anything. Moreover, he doesn't want to think about the divorce or the events that happened after he found out about it, how he threw himself into Dream's arms and messed everything up.

"George!" Quackity shouts, like he's been trying to get his attention for a while. "What the hell is wrong with you? I'm trying to talk to you!"

"Sorry Big Q, your mother was a little distracting," he says and Quackity laughs despite himself.

After he ends the stream, Quackity stays on call. Like he can tell there's something bothering George. He's intuitive like that. It's annoying because George hates how transparent he is. Hates that Quackity knows him so well, well enough to notice and ask when he's off. There was a time, not that long ago, when no one knew him like this.

Now he has a small handful of people he can't bullshit around.

"I'm fine, Q," he says.

"Then why are you acting so weird?"

"It's nothing."

"Was it because your mom was in town? Is she still there?"

"No, she went home," George ignores the first part of his statement.

“Do you just miss your mummy?” Quackity mocks with his hideous British accent and George cringes.

“No,” he denies, but it sounds wrong, like it didn’t come out of his mouth okay. It sounds, in hindsight, incredibly suspicious. “Look I don’t want to talk about anything, okay?”

“Okay, George,” Quackity says, fight gone. He has a better sense for these things than Sapnap, more emotionally intelligent. George wonders what that’s like, he can’t relate.

“Want to just fuck around on the practice server?”

His stomach pangs with hunger, but yeah, he can ignore it a bit longer. Anything to put off dealing with everything. “Sure.”

Because he doesn’t go to Dream, Dream comes to him. George and Quackity are playing Battle Box against Punz and Hannah, newly added to MCC and eager to have a good first showing, when there’s a timid knock on his door.

The door opens before he can answer, and a shaggy head of blond hair pokes itself in.

“Hey,” Dream says, leaning against the door frame.

George’s stomach turns over, but he still says, “Hey.”

There are voices in his ears, his friends talking shit or dying in game or any number of things, but George isn’t paying them attention any more.

“You hungry?”

His stomach rumbles audibly and George looks up to the ceiling. Dream laughs and whatever tension had been building up pops. “I’ll take that as a yes. Come on, Sapnap ordered sushi for us.”

“Sushi?” George is intrigued. They don’t normally order sushi unless they’re trying to bribe George, neither of the other two love it like he does.

“Yeah, he got me some fried rice, too.”

“Is he apologizing for something?” George asks, one eyebrow lifted.

“I dunno,” Dream says, lifting one hand up the door frame. He picks at something. “Is there something he should apologize for?”

Oh, so they’re not talking about Sapnap.

“No,” George says, meaning it for both of his roommates. Dream didn’t do anything wrong. Dream did everything too right, that’s the problem.

“Okay, then,” Dream looks at George again, something like relief around his eyes. “Then it’s not apology sushi.”

“Good,” George stands and stretches. He’s been sitting in his gaming chair all day. “Sorry Sushi doesn’t taste as good as We Simp for George Sushi.”

Dream heaves a sigh, amusement pouring off him in waves. His relief makes him play it up, almost too much. George wants to shake his entire body and get rid of the tension in it.

“Bathroom,” George nods with his head as they exit his room, because walking next to or behind Dream all the way to the kitchen is too much. “Meet you down there.”

We Simp for George Sushi turns into Sapnap night. George has no idea how that happened, he had no say in it. It’s a slow slide from sushi into Sapnap deciding they’re all watching an anime since George “abandoned” them all day. Whatever. As if.

Still, George obediently turns up for anime night. He sits on his side of the couch, lets Dream tuck the OU blanket around him, and throws popcorn at Sapnap’s head, careful to miss Patches who curled up on her favorite arm chair, Sapnap’s presence not enough to hinder her enjoyment of her throne.

The anime doesn’t stun him, it’s not good enough to get lost in. He spends the majority of their time making fun of it with Dream, whispering to each other across the couch out of the sides of their mouths. He’s careful to keep it light, keep it to their normal dynamic, something two best friends would do to annoy their other best friend.

Sapnap catches on but won’t indulge them. He turns the volume up higher every time he catches them whispering, passive aggressively, until the show blares throughout the entire house.

When Dream and George can no longer hear themselves, George gives up and watches the stupid show. Dream turns to the television as well, tugging on the OU blanket until George gives up a corner of it. Alarms sound in his head, this is a slippery slope. They’ve never shared the blanket before, except in the fort. When Dream’s hand brushes up against his own, George jumps.

“What?” Sapnap says, though George can barely hear him. He doesn’t bother responding, just shakes his head that it wasn’t important.

Next to him, Dream won’t look at him. He’s staring holes into the screen of the television, but his hand is still touching George’s, burning against his skin where his pinkie meets Dream’s. He wants nothing more than to lock their fingers together. He knew a long time ago that he always wants those hands on him, admitted that way back. He can’t have it.

He has to draw the line somewhere.

“I’m thirsty,” George announces and as soon as he says it, he feels the truth behind it. He’s parched. His throat is dry and his tongue feels coated in sawdust.

“Bring me a water,” Sapnap demands, not taking his eyes off the show. There’s some kind of

battle music playing, they must be at the climax of something. George doesn't acknowledge Sapnap's request, but he brings an extra bottle anyway.

"What? You didn't bring me one?" Dream whines, his eyes huge in his head and sad.

"You literally didn't ask?" George throws the bottle at Sapnap who flinches, but catches it impressively.

"George," Dream says in a pout.

"Oh my god you're so annoying," George tells him, half joking.

The water quenches the thirst in his throat. He feels like he can breathe again. It also keeps his hands out of the blanket, up in front of him. Now Dream can't mosey on over and call George's every thought into question. He doesn't know how much longer he can do this.

Lucky for him, Sapnap lets them end on the season finale. Eight mediocre, but quick episodes and George can only name one or two things that actually happened, and that's only because he memorized the way Dream's voice sounded when he made fun of it. George isn't an anime guy, okay?

"Wanna come to my room tonight?" Dream asks in an undertone when Sapnap turns off the television. George's stomach drops and rolls over, like it's trying to put out a fire. Stop. Drop. Roll. The fucking fire brigade all up in his guts.

"I, uh," George stammers, water bottle crunching satisfyingly between his restless fingers. "I need to get used to sleeping in my room again."

Dream's face is blank, his version of it. He can't entirely wipe himself of emotion, not to George. He can read the disappointment, the reluctant acceptance, but he knows a stranger on the street wouldn't. They would see a pleasant look, the look of someone who isn't bothered, who it doesn't matter to, one way or the other. George knows, though. George knows. George feels the pain as if it were his own. But better a smaller pain now than a world ending pain when everything goes tits up.

"Okay," Dream tells him, now looking around the room. "Just, if you can't—well, you can find me if you can't sleep."

"Okay," George says, knowing that there's nothing on the planet that could make him take that offer up tonight. Not when his head is back in control, his heart can just please shut up.

Dream ends up streaming. George gets the notification thirty minutes into his Tik Tok binge. He hasn't even liked anything in that time, just letting each video play until a nice person comes on and tells him he should stop. Then he skips that and keeps going, no thoughts, head empty. Just the way he likes it.

Curious, George clicks on the notification and Dream's voice plays out of his tiny phone speaker. He turns the volume down, low enough that he can barely hear it, convinced that if he holds that voice close to his ear and no one else can hear it, then it's a secret that Dream still lulls him to sleep, even when they're separated.

It's the only reason he gets any sleep at all. How sad is that?

They're headed for a reckoning.

George can see it, can tell the seismograph is screaming a warning, the plates are shifting, and Volcano Dream is headed for an explosion.

Days after they hooked up, he hasn't given up. Dream still searches for every chance he has to be close to George. He steels himself for the inevitable discussion. He'll stick to his guns. He won't bring Dream down with him. Not when he's meant for so much more.

It's only another day before it comes. Dream leaves his door open that night when he goes to sleep, a clear invitation for George to join him. A request. Sapnap's room is on the ground floor, there's no reason for him to go far enough down the hallway to even see Dream's door. George's room is at the end of the hallway, he sees it. He hears the deep breaths, an occasional snore drifting out of the master bedroom. And isn't that a funny turn of phrase? Master bedroom. Does that make Dream the master of the house? It sometimes feels like it.

George orders his feet back to his own room, clean from a shower and smelling only of himself and Sapnap's shampoo. Safe.

He doesn't even pretend to sleep, trying Dream's trick and streaming hours of Fortnite until the sun comes up and he hears Sapnap moving around in the kitchen.

He walks downstairs to join him, use his presence to fight off the thoughts muddling around in his brain. Sapnap's good for a bicker, good for a play fight, good for comfort in his own brand.

"Bro, Fortnite without me?" is how Sapnap greets him and, yeah, George loves him.

"Couldn't sleep," he admits. He doesn't need to admit more. George lives in partial truths.

Sapnap shrugs, sleep clinging to his eyes in a way that makes them look glazed over. This is part of the reason why people always think he's high. "I'm going to Punz' later, you want to join?"

"Sure," George says, anything to get out of this house. Anything to stave off the confrontation a little longer. Maybe at Punz' apartment he'll figure out the words he needs. Maybe the wind in his hair while Sapnap speeds with the windows down will transplant into his mind the exact speech to get Dream to understand.

But he highly doubts it.

Here it comes, George thinks to himself. Back from Punz' place after a nice dinner out, Sapnap and George walk inside from the garage. Dream's face says it all. It's so funny that two and a half months ago he wouldn't have known what that look means, wouldn't have matched it with the mood he knows he's caused in Dream. Now he can read the furrowed brow, the betrayal laced across his mouth in the down turned lip, the hesitancy and tension in his shoulders.

"I'm going up to my room," George announces, leaving Dream to finish making his meal and

Sapnap to deal with the nuclear fall out. He darts out of the kitchen and up the stairs. It won't be long now.

Ten minutes. It takes ten minutes for Dream to finish cooking, eat, and clean up after himself. He must have been speed-running. George congratulates himself on the worst joke he's ever made, even in the privacy of his own mind.

The knock sounds again on the outside of his door. For once Dream respects his boundaries and doesn't force himself in, but his knocking again tells George he's not leaving either. Not until they've worked this out.

George takes a deep breath, steeling himself. How funny to know that you're going to be a different person by the end of a conversation. It's rare you go into the confrontation knowing that. George knows that he's walking out of this an updated version of himself. Whether it's good or bad, he doesn't know, but as long as he's still be able to recover his friendship with Dream, that's all that matters.

"Come in," George says, standing up from his gaming chair and throwing himself onto his bed, pulling his pillow onto his lap like a shield. The door squeaks open and Dream stands in the threshold, already defensive. George hates that he's put that into existence. That awkwardness is George's. He doesn't want it.

"So," Dream says, walking hesitantly into the room and spinning his gaming chair, all without looking at George, "You're avoiding me."

He closed the door again. George doesn't know what to think about that.

"No I'm not," he protests weakly, in the event that Dream accepts that and walks back out.

Dream tilts his head, an overture for George not to test his intelligence. "Okay. That's believable. Did you practice in the mirror?"

"Shut up," George says, no heat.

Dream seats himself in the gaming chair and then leans forward, hands coming into a praying position in front of him. He waits a beat, George's breath bated waiting for Dream to step on the land mine. "It was one night, George. We said it would be one night and then we'd move on. I've moved on, have you?"

Now that's a laugh. "Are you actually joking right now?"

"You're the one being—"

"Are you really trying to tell me you've moved on, Dream? Come the fuck on." Is this really how Dream is going to try to play this? Act like he's been the normal one? George can take a lot, but blatant lies aren't on that list.

"George, you're the only one—"

"You tried to hold my hand the other night. When we were watching that stupid anime."

Dream blushes and looks away and George goes in harder, "You invited me back to your bed, Dream. What does—How does that show you've moved on?"

"Because we've been sleeping fine in the same bed, only one of those times was... you know."

“Dream.”

“I sleep better with you, okay? Just a warm body with me, I can sleep easier.”

George’s heart skips a beat and he pushes down the thrill. He’s not alone in that. He knows Dream loves him, couldn’t be more obvious, but to hear it like that? Dream’s insomnia is his greatest foe and hearing George helps combat it, aids him? That’s the real proof right there.

“Dream, you were supposed to make me feel loved for one night,” he says as kindly as he can.

“Not actually fall in love with me.”

“And so what?” Dream says, with a challenge in every line of his body, “You think that was when I fell in love with you?”

George’s mind blanks. Because it was. He did think that was when—

“George, I’ve been in love with you a long time, okay? I’ll admit it.”

“You’re only admitting it because I called you on it,” George argues, but his voice is weak, a shadow of its usual vigor when they argue. This isn’t an argument he’s ever wanted to have. His mind is still reeling from Dream saying he loved him before. How long? When did he know? How did he—

“That doesn’t make it less true. The other night, well—” Dream stutters, unlike him, “The other night was what made me realize you feel that way too.”

“No, I don—”

“George,” Dream pleads. “Don’t lie to me. Not about this. I won’t forgive you if you lie about this.”

George looks at him, tries to see everything about him—the shaggy hair, earnest eyes, how he carries tension around his mouth, a couple day’s growth on his jaw, lackluster about his personal grooming when he knows he’s not going to be on camera. And who is he trying to impress around the house? George? George wants Dream at his ugliest, at his dirtiest, he wants to crawl inside his skin and never leave. He doesn’t care what he looks like, they’re way past that.

Can he tell Dream he doesn’t love him? Every atom in George knows that they can’t be together. Is it better to keep that avenue from him altogether or explain that even though he loves Dream too, he just can’t be with him? There’s no way Dream will understand. Dream is all or nothing. Dream sees in blacks and whites, ironic because he’s not the one who’s colorblind.

He’s never seen Dream so serious, not even in their business meetings when he gets upset with Sapnap and George for dicking around too much, wasting time. Not even when each controversy came calling for him. He’s serious. He won’t forgive George if he lies.

That’s the one thing George can’t risk. He has to have Dream in his life, that’s the whole point of all this. Fuck.

“Fine,” George says, unable to look at him even though every particle of him wants to see how Dream reacts, how he takes the news, how knowing their love is reciprocal lights up his eyes. But he doesn’t want to see the moment Dream realizes it doesn’t matter. “Fine, it’s true.”

“You love me?” Dream asks and it’s only then that George realizes Dream wasn’t sure. Dream gambled and George fell for it.

Fuck. It's too late now.

Dream stands, walks over to the bed and sits beside George, like he's making a pilgrimage. He comes humbly and with open arms and George has to shut it down. The bed dips slightly as he sits and throws off George's equilibrium, tossing him closer to Dream's orbit. He inhales a whiff of his smell and for the first time it pains him even as it comforts him.

He turns to Dream, meets his eyes and tries to look hard. "Yeah," he says, admits it. Confirms what's already out there now, no going back. With his confession, it's like every line of tension in Dream's body eases, he looks a thousand times lighter. A small, wondrous, smile starts to carve itself onto his face and George can't stand it. Can't stand to see how happy he is when it won't last.

Dream's hand comes up to caress his cheek. He watches it coming like an incoming missile, like a solider who knows there's nowhere to run, that it's going to hit and it's going to hurt.

"It doesn't matter, though. This," George points to the space in between them, "can't ever happen."

"George," Dream says, confusion taking over his absurdly emotive face. George swears he could map every thought Dream thinks throughout the day. He can't hide anything.

"I mean it, Dream."

Dream's jaw tightens, "So you love me and I love you, but we can't be together?"

"That's right."

"So the other night, you were what? Testing me out and found me lacking?" Dream's voice cracks and George's resolve shakes. "I wasn't good enough?"

"Don't be stupid," George says.

"Stupid? You want to call me stupid?"

"Of course I wasn't 'testing you out.' That's the most ridiculous thing—"

"Then what was it, George?" Dream asks, anger coloring his voice in a way that's never been directed at George before, not like this. "Because that night meant the world to me! I've never felt like that before. I felt like that was the start of something, and you're saying you didn't feel that?"

God, of course George fucking felt that. Of course the world shook under Dream's tongue. His levees can't take the damage, they're straining to hold the water back, and Dream is playing with powers he doesn't understand. "You just felt an orgasm and went to sleep and didn't—"

"No!" George says, harsher than he meant to be in this conversation, harsher than he ever wants to be with Dream. "That's how I knew you—I asked you to make me feel loved, Dream. And you fucking delivered, okay? It worked. But we can't have more than that. I made that clear. 'Just for tonight,' I said. What part of that makes you think I want more from you?"

"You love me," Dream says and oh no, he's starting to get a look in his eyes. Hard headed, hard hearted, stubborn bastard. "You asked me to make you feel loved, and you ended up making me feel loved too. Because you love me."

"Yeah, idiot. I already said I do, that's not—"

“So, why can’t we be together?” Dream demands, eyes flashing, “You’ve just said we can’t. You haven’t said why or what I did to—”

“It’s just not a good idea,” George says, trying to sound firm. Any sign of weakness and Dream will pounce, has already pounced. Shit this conversation isn’t going the way it was supposed to.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to be with you, that’s enough. That’s enough reason why, Dream. Don’t push me.”

“Normally I’d back away, but George, c’mon. How am I supposed to accept that?” Fuck this logical side of Dream. He’s the worst combination sometimes of someone who is lead so clearly by his emotions but thinks he’s a logical person. “Give me a reason we can’t and if it’s good enough, I’ll back off.”

“Dream, that’s not how it works, that’s not—”

“I’m in love with you George,” Dream says, taking George’s hand gently in his, “You’re my person. I want to spend all my time with you and—”

George slips his hand out of Dream’s, “Okay, but I didn’t ask—”

They’re talking over each other, faces close in their intensity. The sexual tension is there but George makes himself feel the anger more heavily, weighs it more and sinks himself into it, wraps it around himself for protection.

“I make your heart beat faster,” Dream says, bringing his hand up to George’s neck and feeling his pulse. True to his word, George’s heart is racing.

“Anger is making my heart beat faster,” George argues, throwing Dream’s hand off him. He doesn’t want to be touched right now.

That’s a lie. Even like this, he wants Dream to touch him. Always wants to be skin to skin with Dream. And isn’t that what George is talking about? He wants Dream to touch him, even in anger. That can’t be healthy. He wants Dream’s anger and his jealousy and his pettiness and he even wants him to demolish the boundaries George puts up in canvas, the ones he doesn’t really mean, the ones he thinks he means but doesn’t. Not really.

But with no boundaries, Dream is free to invade him. And George will flood the battle field and drown him in return. Smother him.

“I can’t not be friends with you, Dream,” George says quietly. “If we’re together and something happens—” if George’s worst fears come true and his tsunamis are strong enough to push Dream away, he can’t handle being alone. “—how am I supposed to be okay after that? We live together. We work together. People on the internet will ask about it all the time, how can I escape from that?”

After several deep breaths from both of them, Dream asks, “Why are you so convinced something bad will happen?”

“Relationships end, Dream. Haven’t we fucking learned that this week?” Because George certainly learned that this week, had it seared into his heart like a brand. No one is safe. You can love someone for thirty years and then one day they can just up and change their mind, replace you. It’s bullshit. Why does anyone choose to be with someone with the potential to hurt them like that?

Dream's voice is softer than down when he says, "That doesn't mean ours will."

"If we don't have one, then we'll never break up." George can be logical too.

"So this is about your parents. Fuck, George." He runs his hand over his face, like he's wiping all the happiness off.

"This isn't about my parents. This is about us. My parents weren't like this," George says, gesturing between them again. He's trying to explain but he's never been good with words, okay? He doesn't do emotional conversations well and Dream should fucking know that. Of all people.

"Yeah, George, and now they're not together anymore. And probably shouldn't have been for years. That does happen sometimes. But that doesn't mean that will happen to us. We actually like to spend time with each other. We understand each other in a way your parents never understood each other. Beyond just being in love and having fucking crazy sexual chemistry."

"Dream," he says because he's not sure how else to get him to stop. He doesn't want to give himself even a sliver of hope, doesn't want to hear it in Dream's voice either. He doesn't want to lose him, but it looks like he might anyway. Fuck.

"George, you can't hold that relationship up as the standard anymore. You really never should have. Kate would be the first to tell you that."

Well, Jesus, if they're going up in flames, he might as well really commit. If he's going to regret this forever and think about it until the end of time, he might as well get his money's worth.

"How do you feel about me?" he asks, burning with desire to know. Just once. Just once he wants to hear how he makes Dream's heart beat faster too. He wants to know how much more he loves Dream, confirm that George alone is a crazy psycho with his too deep feelings.

When you're at the beach and you can't see the land on the other side of the ocean, at the horizon, that's how much he loves Dream, how big. He wants to know how much Dream loves him. Maybe that's selfish, no, that's completely selfish, when he knows they can't, they can't pursue it, but. Fuck. He's just a man, he's learned that, too, this week. A weak man who wants things and can't leave them alone.

"I know you lo—I mean, what exactly is it that you—"

"What do I feel about you?" Dream's eyes widen, surprised by the shift in the conversation. "Are you kidding me?"

"No, because what I feel is like," he throws his head into his hands. "It's too much, Dream. It's too much. I'm going to drown you."

"What—how can it be too much?" Dream's careful with him, his voice low like he's talking to a child and George wishes he could hate it, but it feels nice.

He lifts his head up and instead of replying, asks, "Can you just—can you just tell me?"

"Okay, yeah, I—God, I want to touch you all the time," his hand dances up George's arm, goose bumps breaking out on his skin, embarrassing proof of what Dream's touch does to him. He swallows deeply and continues listening, "My fingers itch to be touching you, all the time. I have to constantly hold myself back."

"I want to give you anything, everything, your happiness is more important than my own. I want to

open you up and know every single thing about you—what you ate for breakfast as a kid, where you went to primary school, the nicknames you had, who your friends were in college, what you think of everything. And I want you to know all those things about me,” that sounds not so different from before George thought Dream loved him. Maybe he has loved him a long time. Why didn’t he ever—? Why did he—?

Dream continues, all earnest and sincerity dripping out of every pore, “This thing you’re so worried about, drowning me or whatever, God, I can say the same for you, too. I want to put you in a little submarine and let you sink in me.”

Fuck.

“Is that what you wanted to hear, George?”

“I just wanted to hear the truth,” he says, returning the honesty. They sit in silence for a while, neither of them sure where to go from here. George is surprised at Dream, he would have thought he’d push more, take advantage of this weakness in George’s front lines, press for what he wants. Instead, he sits despondent beside George, both of their backs now to the headboard and neither of them looking at each other. Selfishly, George is glad this conversation is happening here in his own room, so that he doesn’t have to taint the sanctity of Dream’s. Those memories are safe there, untarnished by the scar of this confrontation.

It’s Dream who breaks the silence. Of course it’s Dream. “So you won’t be with me, even though we’re in love and actually perfect for each other.”

“Dream.” At least it sounds like he’s started to accept it. George doesn’t rejoice at the victory.

“Are you going to be alone forever?”

“I don’t know,” he says, unable to imagine bringing anyone into their inner circle. Part of him thinks he will be alone forever, and he’ll be okay with it. As long as everyone is safe.

“Or are you going to find some girl you don’t even like and marry her? Just, what, to be like your parents?” Dream’s resorting to lashing out and George gets it, but it still hurts, “Like, what’s the plan here?”

“And what if I did?” George argues, “It won’t be your business who I marry.” Even if he has no plans of actually marrying anyone else.

“So you’re going to marry boring Mary Sue or whatever and then, what, keep coming to me with everything else? Everything important?”

“No.” Even if he did marry someone, he couldn’t— Dream would never— How could anyone make him feel better like Dream does? How could anyone soothe his soul or ease his pain or calm him down like Dream does?

Naturally Dream takes that the wrong way, “So we won’t even be friends?”

“I didn’t say that. I can’t not be friends with you, Dream,” he looks over at him, if anything in this conversation sticks with Dream, he wants it to be this, that he values their friendship more than anything else, that he values Dream more than anything else, makes him a priority, can’t live without him, as pathetic as that is, “that’s the whole fucking point. I can’t lose you.”

“George,” Dream exhales sharply through his nose, “we can’t sustain this. You’re not Sapnap to me. I can’t be this close to you and not want more. I can’t know you’re in love with me too and just

accept that we aren't together. If it was only me, I'd be able to, I dunno... let you go. If you really didn't want me, weren't interested, but when you're telling me you love me too but just don't want to be with me? Fuck."

His stomach tightens, something ugly from the black lagoon poking its head up from the depths, "Dream, are you giving me an ultimatum?"

"No, I'm just being realistic," he says. "Can you honestly say you'd be okay with that? I mean, could you watch me find someone else? Marry them?"

"No." The idea alone makes him want to scratch his own eyeballs out. He'd have to move back to England if that ever comes to pass. He can't watch that in real time.

"Then, I don't know what you want. I don't know how you're thinking this is going to pan out, George," Dream looks sad, the fight leaving him empty. "You can't have everything and nothing at the same time. It doesn't work that way."

"Schroedinger's streamers."

The joke is worth it for the brief pull at Dream's stern mouth. "Don't be funny when I'm mad."

"Sorry."

"I'm trying to accept this George, I am, but it just doesn't make any sense to me. Like, I need you to explain it more."

"I don't know how to—"

"What's your worst case scenario if we give it a go?"

George loves Dream. So fucking much. Even here, he's communicating, he's trying his hardest to understand where George is coming from. He doesn't like the decision, but he's trying to see George's side of it. He blinks back tears and then thinks about the question he's posing. The biggest fear, of course, "You realize I'm too much and hate me."

He thinks longer, and Dream gives him the space to explore the rest of it, to really come up with everything he's scared of. His brain goes wild, "It ends badly and you kick me out of the house, and we're not even friends anymore. Sappnap takes your side and I have no friends. You realize you were better off without me and regret choosing to be with me," the more he talks, the easier things fall off his tongue, so many fears, he's so fucking scared of it all. He sounds like a big baby and he can't believe Dream is even still listening to this.

"I can't do my job because it reminds me of you, because you got me here. I can't go online without seeing people talking about you, asking me about you. And you're worse off because you were with me," there's more, he's sure, but they become interconnected, all stemming from Dream deciding he doesn't want George anymore and asking him to leave. He adds one more, "I dunno, maybe I get skin cancer, too."

"You hear how ridiculous that sounds, right?"

"Dream, come on," George doesn't like having his fears mocked, not like this, not when he's like this, barely able to trust even Dream with those fears, vulnerable in a different way from the other night, "You asked."

"Why would I ever decide I hate you?" Dream asks, careful and confused.

“I don’t know,” George hasn’t given that side of things much thought, more worried about the fall out than how they get there. He’s reluctant to give Dream more reasons now, but in the spirit of open and honest communication, says “You realize how needy I am—how I want to be by your side all the fucking time, how I want to know what you think of everything. I can’t make a decision without your input. I want you to kiss me all the time, like even in public when we’re around other people. That’s—that’s too much, no one wants that around.”

Dream grabs George’s shoulders and shakes him, jarringly, “God, fuck you George, that’s exactly how I feel! All the time!”

The shaking stops, but George feels like his brain keeps going, bouncing around the inside of his skull, “You do?”

“Yes! Have you not been listening? All that stuff you’ve been feeling and you’ve been so scared of? That’s like real fucking love, George. I feel that for you, too. Maybe more, I dunno, since I’ve been letting myself feel it.”

Every time he thinks he knows Dream loves him, finally accepts it, he does something that forces George to realize it again. Or realize how much deeper those feelings go, igniting his whole body.

“And you aren’t afraid... that we’ll burn out or love each other too much? Or...”

“How can we love each other too much? Like honestly, how is that a bad thing?”

Dream says it like it makes no sense, but to George, the question is how can people just walk around with all those feelings in their hearts all the time? How can they live with themselves with the depth of feelings that Dream inspires within him? How can they do anything else in their day other than think about it, reflect on it, thank god and the universe and whomever for it every second of every day? How do they walk around with those feelings and not covet them, worry constantly about them being taken away? Like, don’t they have to work?

“What if I drag you down?”

“You don’t. You never have. You lift me up, baby. You make me better. And, yeah, maybe we’ll have rough patches, but I want to be there to help you during those, just like I’ve always done even when we’ve just been friends. You’ve been okay with that when I’ve just been your friend. Why would us being together be different?”

Okay, Dream makes a pretty good point here. But the difference is if George pushes too hard when they’re together, Dream could decide he’s too much and not want to be together anymore. And George would just die because he would know what it’s like to be with Dream, to be loved by him, not like this, truly loved and allowed to touch whenever he wants, and—

“God, and all that stuff you were saying about being needy?” Dream continues, “I mean, no offense, George, but you’re already like that as my friend. I loved that when you were in London and I enjoy it even more now, what makes you think I’m going to decide it’s too much if you’re my boyfriend? At least I’ll get to have sex with you if you’re my boyfriend.”

“Dream.”

“What if we did this...” Dream’s eyes light up like they do when he has a brilliant idea. George can only feel apprehension. “What if we have a trial period, like a month or something, where you let yourself love me the way we both want you to. And you let yourself be loved. And then we see how it’s going.”

George snorts. “That won’t work, it’ll be too late by then.” He’s already in too deep now and they’re not even together. It’ll already break him into a thousand pieces if Dream decides to give up on him and pushes him out of his life, how much worse would it be when he’s had a month to really love him? Hold him?

“George, just... please.” Dream pleads, his voice breaking and he rubs his eyes, maybe to hide tears, maybe not. George doesn’t know, not sure he wants to know. He’s already the worst person in the universe.

“I can’t believe the reason you won’t be with me is because you love me too much,” Dream lifts his head again and there are no tears, only an ugly facsimile of amusement, “That’s, fuck, that’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. What’s the right amount to love me? Enough to have regular sex and, what, like go on vacations together? But not more than that? Fuck I hate that. I don’t want that. I don’t want what your parents had, George. I want what we have.”

George crosses his arms and tries to stay steady.

“How do I explain to anyone that no, George and I aren’t together. Why? Oh, it’s because he loves me *too* much, like how does that even make sense?”

George ignores that to ask, “Do you really want me around all the time?” because he can’t believe Dream really feels like that.

“You mean, am I really as needy as you?”

“Yeah.”

“Worse, George. How can I get it through your head you won’t be too much? Even if I act annoyed or whatever, I always want you around, close to me. Don’t you feel that way, too?”

“Yeah, I always want you around. But I thought that was just like a me being too much thing.”

“No, George. What do you think all those ten hours discord calls were about? I want to be with you all the time. You don’t see me in ten hour discord calls with Bad or Sam or Tommy or anyone else. Just you.”

Dream sighs, and before George can say anything else, not that he even knows what to say, continues, “And besides, who’s the judge here saying you’re too needy? Me. I’m the judge and I won’t ever get enough of you, okay?”

There comes a point when talking more isn’t going to resolve anything. Dream’s given him a lot to think about, a lot to take in and turn over and fuck like burn his words into George’s spirit. He has a lot to think about and he’s not comfortable coming to a resolution right here and now. He won’t make a split second decision about their futures just because Dream is frustrated with him. Dream means more than that. George values himself too much to do that to either of them.

But the surety he had at the beginning of this conversation isn’t there either. He can’t sweep the whole thing under the rug and call it a day. Dream’s provided him with new information that effects the decision, an insight into his own love and life that George can’t ignore or not take into consideration. He walked into this talk thinking they would never be together because George is too much and now he’s worried that they’re both too much, a supernova.

“I think I need to go to England,” he says, unsure where the thought even came from. He likes the idea, though. The longer he thinks about it, the more it grows on him “I should go help Mum get settled, and maybe we need some like breathing room.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yeah, George, I’m not going to sit here and beg you to be with me if you really don’t want to. If you need space, you need space. I could probably do with some space now too, to be honest.”

“We’ll talk when I get back?” George asks, already feeling anxious about the whole ordeal. He hates fighting with Dream.

“I mean, I still want to talk to you even while you’re gone. I’ll miss you,” Dream says, offering his heart on a silver platter, again, “But, yeah, we don’t have to discuss *this* until you get back.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Don't hate me! Remember we have a happy ending tag on this fic :)

Chapter 11 will be up soon, but I have to figure out how to handle George's dad. We meet George's sister next chapter and more of Kate.

Thank you for all your kudos and comments and nice words. I've been overwhelmed with love on this fic and it means the world to me. <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

George in London

Chapter Notes

This chapter deleted itself from my computer when I was hours from posting, and in retrospect, I'm glad. I like how this chapter worked out better.

thanks to @Jestbee for Brit picking, beta reading, and checking on my mental health in general. You ever meet someone and think, "I would go to war for you?" Honestly, thank you so much :) I don't know how to add hyperlinks, but do yourself a favor and check out her stories on AO3 and follow her on twitter, both under this name.

Next chapter is in the works and will be up soon.

Neve meets him in arrivals with a backpack and an excited squeal. He throws his arms around her, tighter than ever before, and sinks into the embrace. She's tall, only a centimeter or so shorter than him, and never lets him live it down. She still smells the same—like cotton and antagonism and little sister.

"Fuck, you're tan," she says when he realizes himself and releases her.

"I'm not as tan as, like, real Floridians," he says, thinking of Dream's golden skin, the shade darker he turned after their trip to the beach. He shakes his head, no more thoughts of Dream, please, for one goddamn minute.

"I thought *you* were a real Floridian now," Neve ignores his suitcase and locks his arm around hers, "Threw yourself in with their lot and told the rest of us to go fuck ourselves."

He drags the suitcase on its wheels and lets himself be led towards the doors on the far side of the hall. "To be fair, I only told you to go fuck yourself."

She laughs, a high trill sound. He would know that laugh at the end of the world, underwater, it's a comfort to him now. Things can't be too bad if he's still making Neve laugh. He spent a good majority of his childhood making her scream, laugh, cry—all manner of emotions.

"Are you ready to see Mum's new place?" Neve asks, her head cocked to the side. George looks over to where her eyes are focused and sees a group of teenage girls watching them intently. The psychic vibes he's picked up from doing vlogs with Tommy tells him they've recognized him. Shit. And he has his arm around Neve's.

"Hey!" Neve shouts towards the girls and though George goes to shush her, she pushes his arm down harshly. It hurts. She's the only person not scared to fight him full out, to really hurt him.

Sapnap only wishes he could be as ruthless as George's little sister.

"Shut up!"

"Hey," Neve says again, waving towards the girls, she cups her mouth and shouts across the busy hall, to George's eternal mortification, "I'm his sister!"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" George hisses through his teeth, trying to keep his face neutral in case they're taking pictures. He waves awkwardly at the group and hurries Neve along, hoping to avoid the situation entirely.

"They were taking pictures and I don't want them to think I'd ever go for someone as ugly as you," she says. "I have, like, class and taste."

"You had a childhood crush on the animated Robin Hood," George points out, the automatic doors to the rideshare line in sight, "so no you don't."

"So did you, idiot," she smiles at him, overly sweet enough to know she doesn't mean it, "that's why you always watched it with me."

"He'd choose me over you," George says, the only new development in this decades-long argument that he's not denying having the crush any longer.

"I'm an independent woman and I don't need a man," Neve says back, her eyes lit up with the thrill of the chase, the hunt. She's caught a scent. "Besides, you're locked down these days. Dream won't let Robin Hood rescue you from your life in the castle, Maid Mari-George."

He elbows her again. Harder. Until she elbows him back and bruises a rib. God, he hates her.

"Fine, you can have stupid Robin Hood," George rolls his eyes. He doesn't care. She can have the cartoon character, why are they even arguing about this? He just hates to lose and it's been a reoccurring fight since they were kids.

"Aww, because you only want your Dreamie-poo?" She makes sickening kissy noises and George wants to die.

"Fucking shut up, Neve," George says again, this time meaning it. She doesn't know she's hit on a sore subject and only whatever newfound maturity she's come into as a uni graduate stalls her tongue further. By the self-satisfied energy in the air between them, he knows she's letting him have this one.

"Come on," Neve says once they reach the ride share line, "Let's go see Mum and the flat your beau hooked her up with. I might even let you buy me a coffee."

George snorts and clicks on his Uber app, "I'm not buying you a coffee."

"This coffee is soooo good," Neve says, sitting across from him in a Costa not thirty minutes later. "I think it tastes better because you paid for it."

It's not fair that she used the face to manipulate him—the same face she's been using to get him to do things for her since they were toddlers, whether that's let her have a turn on his video game, or let her stay in his room during thunderstorms, he's a sucker for that look and they both know it. Surely they'll grow out of it at some point, but it seems like not yet. He glares at her and asks, mock serious, "Have I told you lately that I fucking hate you?"

"You muttered about it under your breath in the uber, but no, not to my face," her eyes crinkle in amusement and god she looks exactly like their mother. Except the hair. She has the same hair as George, dark enough to be black in certain lighting, fluffy and healthy. They once accidentally got the same haircut when they were really little, something about Mum being sleep deprived and telling the hairdresser the wrong thing and winding up with two children with bowl cuts. A framed photo for proof sat on the top of Mum and Dad's dresser for years. George wonders now where that photo will end up.

Just then Mum walks back from the bar, now-sweetened coffee in hand, and Neve and George both revert to their best behavior, the part of him that still feels like a little boy around her eager to please her today.

"So," she says, unfolding a napkin and flattening it in front of her. Like some kind of prim and proper marm from the olden days. Not like his mum who played laser tag less than a week ago.

"So," George says, encouraging her. He takes a sip of his apple juice, ignoring the twinkle in Neve's eyes.

"This is the neighborhood," Mum says, obvious. George shares a look with Neve and then sighs. Mum hasn't let them up into the flat, yet. When he called to say they were close, she told them to meet her at this Costa, like she's ashamed of the flat or something.

"It's lovely, Mum," Neve says, looking out the windows at the buildings surrounding them and people moving swiftly up and down the pavement, and she's right. It's nowhere close to the side of London George inhabited in his little blank flat stopover before he could move to America. They're in a nice part of the city, an expensive side of the city. They passed a small park on the Uber ride here with school children playing football and adults jogging with their dogs around the paved trails. It's fenced and likely closes at sunset, like most parks do. There's a significant lack of graffiti and vandalism.

"Yeah, it's nice," George says, his suitcase leaning up against his chair to prevent theft. He touches it to remind himself it's still there.

"I'm glad you like it," Mum says, "It's just a long term AirBnB for now. If I like the area after a couple months, well, I don't know. Maybe I'll find a way to stay."

"So, short term, huh?" Neve asks, a line appearing between her eyebrows. "Where are you going to settle? No offense, Mum, but this part of London is expensive. I was shocked when I read the address."

Mum sighs, "Dream wouldn't let me stay anywhere unsafe."

George huffs out a laugh, of course Dream had a hand in this. "I bet he looked up, like, crime statistics and property values."

"You say that like he didn't already have the information handy. He did a lot of research on London when you lived here, George."

“Simp,” Neve mutters under her breath and George laughs, too.

“Are you doing okay, Mum?” Neve asks, concern lacing her face. It’s sometimes strange to watch her and Mum together, they look so similar. Their facial expressions are mirror images which helps George read them both. “Like, actually?”

Mum takes a deep pull from her coffee and he deduces that lightness she discovered in Florida hasn’t abandoned her. Once George looks for it, he finds it around her tension free shoulders, the permanent upturn around her mouth like she’s constantly on the verge of a smile. For years that mouth was down-turned and George didn’t pay any attention. Now he finds himself scrutinizing this face he knows so well.

“You know what? I’m doing really well, actually.”

“That’s good,” Neve pats her hand and George rather thinks Neve doesn’t believe her. But George does. He does think she’s doing really well.

“Are you going to show us this flat, Mum, or are you ashamed of us?” George says and downs the rest of his apple juice. “No offense, but I’m tired from the flight and I’d like to crash.”

“Of course,” Mum says and picks up her cup. She tries to fight George for his suitcase and loses. He’s dragged the thing this far, it can make another short journey with him.

“I don’t recognize that bag,” Mum says, looking at it closer.

“It’s Dream’s,” George gathers the rubbish on the table, Mum’s napkin and his juice bottle and goes to throw them away to hide the blush creeping around his nose and cheeks. “I didn’t have one small enough for a carry on.”

“That was sweet of him,” Mum remarks and Neve pretends to gag behind her back. It’s enough to make George smile.

Her flat is small. Comfy. It’s furnished and that’s likely the reason she went with this one, so as not to move too many items when she leaves this place. George lets his fingers trail over everything, like taking it in with just his eyes and ears isn’t enough, he needs to know the feeling of the place, what the pictures online can’t tell you.

The wood grain on the coffee table is bumpy and the TV screen has a buzz of electricity when it’s freshly turned off. The flowers by the front entrance are fake, but robust with life regardless. They add something to the room, a pop of color or a reminder of life, something intangible to George.

The sofa is corduroy and cream, hiding a small stain under a scatter cushion of what he assumes is green but rather looks like a mustard yellow to him. He puts the cushion back when he’s done inspecting the piece.

“That’s your bed, George,” Mum tells him from the kitchen where she’s putting the kettle on to boil like they didn’t just finish the dregs of their coffee outside. But she’s a mum and she’s British, so she’s making tea. At least Neve will drink it.

“Is it comfortable at least?” George asks, looking dubiously at the sofa bed. It won’t be Dream’s bed, no match for the sacrifice he made to the mattress gods, but at least he doesn’t have to leave at the end of the night, to go spend the evening in a clinical hotel room devoid of life.

“Absolutely no idea,” Mum says with a smirk and Neve laughs. “Neve you’re with me if you want.”

“I’m sure as fuck not staying with George,” she says with a fake shiver of horror. Always so dramatic, that one.

“I’ve been reliably informed he still steals covers,” Mum says, sotto voice and George wonders why he even puts up with them. What other secrets has Dream let slip to his mum? This one is rather benign, but still. He was hoping Mum would never figure out where he slept while she took his room.

One bedroom. That’s all she needs, really. Of course it’s a one bedroom. What would she do with extra bedrooms? Just more rooms to clean and shit to sort when she leaves.

They drink their teas and George holds a cup of his own, lets the tea warm his hand and pretends to drink it while Mum talks more about her plans for the future. None of them have talked to Dad, not since George’s last call and Mum’s confrontation in Brighton. She doesn’t go into detail with them, preferring to keep things private for their dad. George wishes she wouldn’t, not for his sake, but he watches Neve’s hackles raise and knows without a doubt that trouble’s brewing there.

Neve is supposed to stay with Dad, at least while she finds a job in her field. That’s been the plan since Christmas, she graduates and moved back into the house in Brighton just like George. She took a first in Engineering and she had to fight tooth and nail from even starting the course to begin with, Dad started in on her early about business when George declined, to being the only girl enrolled in Engineering at her university. He won’t tell her, not in so many words, but he’s incredibly proud of her.

George gets roped into helping her move her shit out of the university halls tomorrow and temporarily to Mum’s place until Dad can bring the car up and deliver them to Brighton. George already dreads it. He hasn’t stepped foot back on a uni campus since he graduated himself.

Conversation dwindles and George pushes past his exhaustion to stay up with them, knowing his bed in the middle of the living space will end the party early. And he’s having a lovely time. As much as the conversation is rough, it’s real. It’s the first real adult conversation the three of them have ever had. It’s a nice dynamic.

When Mum catches his third yawn, she bids him goodnight and drags Neve into the bedroom so he can rest. George thinks Neve will probably put her airpods in and fuck around on her phone for hours, but at least she won’t be in here distracting him.

He brushes his teeth and rummages around in Dream’s suitcase to find clean joggers to change into. He takes a much needed shower and feels more himself. He still has his British charger so he plugs his phone in and then... he stares up at the ceiling.

The day won’t escape him and there’s only one person he wants to talk to about it. He hasn’t given the conversation with Dream enough thought, hasn’t come to a conclusion yet, but that doesn’t stop him from wanting to talk to him.

“George?” Dream says when he picks up, voice soft and rumble. George’s favorite version of it.

“Hey,” he says, settling onto his side and balancing his phone precariously against his face.

“What’s up? You okay?”

“Yeah, just...” just wanted to hear Dream’s voice. Ugh, he can’t say that out loud. Too pathetic, even for him.

“Long day?”

“Yeah, long day.” He smiles into the dark room, picturing Dream doing the same on his own bed. Maybe Patches took pity on him and perched herself on the end of the bed to keep him company. The streetlight will be shining through the window, casting him in yellow light. Suddenly George aches to be there with him. What was he thinking coming here? He spent so long trying to get out of London and home to Orlando and here he is, back in London when all he wants to do is go home.

“How’s Kate?”

He takes a deep breath. He loves how entwined Mum and Dream are. He likes to joke about it, but their fondness for each other warms his heart. To see two people he loves so thoroughly love each other too? This must be what it felt like to Dream when George and Sappnap got along.

“She’s doing well.”

“Good,” Dream says and his voice is waking up. George wishes it didn’t take as little time as it does, that he could stretch the patch of time when Dream’s voice rumbles into his ears like this. “How’s the flat?”

“Nice,” George says a little lamely, but he can’t exactly talk about the wood grain of the coffee table or the fake flowers. Then again, this is Dream, maybe he can. He’d probably enjoy hearing all that. “I’m on the sofa bed.”

“You didn’t get a hotel?” Dream asks, a touch of concern lacing his voice, “Sofa beds can’t be very comfortable. If they’re anything like pull outs.”

“I’ll *pull out*,” George says without thinking and immediately regrets it. They left off at such a weird place, sexual jokes like that aren’t—

Dream laughs. He’s laughing. “I mean you could, or you could not.”

“Dream!”

“What? A guy can’t make a cream pie joke to his best friend?” The laughter is still there, but George can hear a strain in Dream’s voice now, he’s trying too hard to appear normal. Somehow that makes George feel better and worse at the same time. Dream doesn’t want to lose what’s special between them either.

“I regret calling you.”

Dream scoffs and George can picture him rolling his eyes, he can imagine the exact face Dream would be making right now. The difference between the last time he was in London and today isn’t that he’s now in love with Dream, he’s always been in love with Dream, but now he has a fuller picture. The ache inside him to be home grows.

“You don’t,” Dream says, confidently, “You could never regret me.”

The university campus is bustling with people the next day. Unfortunately. George grabs a black face mask and dons it, hoping to avoid gawkers. If he wanted to stay incognito, then journeying to a place saturated in his target demographic wasn’t the right move.

He blames Neve.

He likes to blame Neve for many things in his life, some even deserved. This one is for sure on her, though.

“George, hurry the fuck up,” she screeches when he ducks behind the box they’re carrying together to avoid another curious glance from across the car park.

“Sorry, sorry,” he says and lifts his side up again. He’s not as weak as people try to make him out to be, but he hasn’t exactly touched the free weights in Dream’s office/gym in the entire time he’s been in Florida either.

They make good time and Neve commands a close friend to stay and watch her stuff on the curb while they bring down the last bags of clothes before George calls a taxi. There’s just enough room in the boot to fit everything if Neve holds a bag of purses on her lap. The taxi driver declines to help shovel everything in, and he’s eager to click on the meter. George silently fumes.

Mum’s waiting by the side of the road when the taxi pulls up and together, they take everything up to the flat in shifts.

“He’ll be here tomorrow,” Neve says looking down at her phone. The tea Mum made for them grows cold in George’s hand. He didn’t finish the last one she made, why does she keep making them for him? He sits silently beside Neve at the table and places his cup between them, an offering if she views it that way.

“What time?” Mum asks with a look around her eye that George can’t place. It’s not hatred, or anything close. The closest he can come to is awkwardness. Or perhaps apprehension, a mix of all of those things and some George can’t see. He can’t imagine what she’s feeling.

Neve looks again at her phone, squinting down and reminding George of Karl for a second. Is she also pretending her eyes are fine? “He didn’t say, but I’ll ask.” Her fingers fly over the touch screen and George looks over at Mum.

“Can you ask him to bring the coffee maker?” Mum turns to the kitchen, taking a sponge to the dirty mug from her own tea in order to keep them from seeing her face. It’s a tactic George employs often and he sees now where he gets it from.

Dad doesn’t like coffee. George doesn’t think it’s a genetic thing, liking or disliking coffee, not like how coriander has that gene that makes it taste like soap to some people, but he isn’t happy to have anything in common with Dad right now. Dad doesn’t need the coffee machine, there’s no reason not to bring it. Mum bought that thing in Tesco on an impulse over ten years ago and she’s loved it ever since. It would be cruel to have them separated any longer.

Neve clears her throat and reads out the latest news: “He says he’ll bring it and he’ll be here around 9:00.”

“Oh, 9:00 works,” Mum says, pleased. She abandons the sponge and sits down with them.

Neve catches George’s eye because they’re only adversaries until they need to be allies and neither of them are thrilled to be up so early tomorrow. George is still battling the jet lag and Neve is still on Uni student time. What fresh torture will they endure tomorrow? The first meeting of the entire family not only since the divorce news, but god, since last Christmas.

“He’s not bringing...her with him, is he?” George wonders aloud.

“He better not,” Neve says, hackles rising again, “If he knows what’s good for him.” George half expects her to crack her knuckles like a mob boss. He’s rather disappointed when she doesn’t.

“Stop,” Mum pleads in her no nonsense voice. “There’s no need to act like that, Neve. And George, you won’t be rude to your father either. He’s going through a lot right now, too.”

“But he—”

“No,” Mum says, cutting Neve off before she can get going. “We’re not going to act like that. You will be respectful to your father, especially because he’s allowing you to live with him while you look for a job. You’re going to be grateful.”

“Fine,” Neve says through gritted teeth. They can all tell she’s picking her battles, retreating until a better opportunity comes.

“Neve,” Mum says, pinning her down with eyes alone.

“I’ll play nice,” Neve says, “but I won’t be happy about it.”

“No one asked you to be happy about it,” George points out because he’s an older brother, he can’t help it. He wants his sister to be happy in a general sense of her well-being, but he still delights in short term unhappiness.

“No one asked you at all,” Neve shoots back at him and he laughs.

“One wouldn’t think you two are grown adults, the way you pick at each other,” Mum says, shaking her head.

George sticks his tongue out at Neve when Mum looks away.

The next morning Mum wakes him up way before Dad’s scheduled to come. George’s alarm was set for 8:00 and he was mentally prepared to wake up that early, not for Mum’s stomping and last minute fiddling at 6:30. Her nervous energy is contagious and George sits in the sofa bed, warm under the covers, while he watches her flit around the flat. She hasn’t been there long enough for there to be any dust or dirt. There’s nothing to Hoover nor dishes to wash so she walks around in circles like a herd dog with no herd until she pauses in the kitchen, looking bereft.

“Mum,” George says and he clearly startles her.

“Oh, good morning, George.”

“You alright, Mum?”

Her smile isn’t fooling anyone, but he pretends like it does. He lets her help him put the sofa bed away, and then watches her cook breakfast. She doesn’t have a fancy speaker like they do in Florida, but when he blasts music out of his phone and pulls her into his arms to dance, that smile turns real. George twirls Mum around the kitchen until they’re both laughing and Neve joins the group with eyes only for the kettle.

“Thanks, baby,” Mum says to him, a hand in his hair. He thinks she might be coming around to the longer hair. “I needed that.”

He shrugs with one shoulder, “It’s our thing. I’m going to miss that without you.”

“Sapnap won’t let you dance alone,” Mum says, a twinkle in her eye.

“I’d like to keep both my feet, thanks,” George replies, remembering the way Sapnap purposefully dropped him in their Orlando home and the way Dream snatched him right up off the floor and into his arms.

In the end, things are strange. Dad’s very businesslike and George spares a thought to wonder if this is how he is at work, closing deals or whatever he does. He avoids Mum and both of them seem to be okay with that. George takes the coffee maker from him and finds a spot on the kitchen counter for it. Dad was nice enough to include the coffee grounds she left at the house as well and with nothing better to do, George brews a carafe.

Neve helps carry her things down to Dad’s car, parked in the loading zone illegally. They won’t be long.

He watches Dad load the last box into the back seat and then there’s nothing holding him here. He isn’t bound to Mum and he isn’t bound to George.

Mum hugs Neve hard, eliciting promises to visit often and to keep her updated on the job hunt. Neve scheduled a painting class with Mum later in the week so it won’t be so long until they see each other again.

“I’ve already got applications out,” Neve whispers into George’s ear when they hug goodbye. “I’ve never procrastinated less on anything in my life.”

“Hopefully it won’t be long, then,” George says back, “And you can always come to Orlando.”

“Will you have a guest room by then?” Neve asks and well, George has no idea. Because if he and Dream are together, then he’ll move in with Dream. The little room with blue walls and Patches’ sun spot will be the guest room, or maybe just George’s office. If he isn’t with Dream, then they won’t have a guest room. They’ll have to sort out hotels or he’ll have to barter with Sapnap to give up his room or something.

“Maybe,” he tells her, “but there’s always room for you there.”

She smiles at him and fuck he’s going to miss her. All she does is order him around and tease him but he’s going to miss her a lot. “Learn to play Minecraft and then game with me.”

“I would rather die,” she says with a straight face and then throws herself into the car.

“George,” Dad says with a nod.

“Dad,” he says back, “Drive safe.” Another nod, he gets in the car, and then they’re gone. Those four words were the only ones exchanged between them.

With Neve gone, the flat is calmer. His sister radiates a constant state of chaos, something he himself can only tap into for a length of time but can’t maintain indefinitely. It can make her exhausting to be around.

When they finish waving Neve and Dad off, Mum steps back up to the flat, turns on the TV, and pours a glass of wine for both of them, no matter that it’s barely mid-morning. George isn’t a wine

drinker, but he won't say no after all that.

Reality show after reality show plays and George finishes his glass of wine and then accidentally finishes another, his mind far away from here. Mum looks sideways at him occasionally, maybe waiting for an opening to ask about him. He knows she's curious about why he chose to fly in. He wasn't really needed here. Mum and Neve could have handled Neve's dorm stuff together, he just took up a bed and forced them to share. He's only been gone for two and a half months and as she knows, he loves his life in Orlando. She saw it first hand. He knows she's dying to know what brought him here.

After the third glass of wine, he places the glass on the coffee table, bumps be damned, and George says, "I think Dream is in love with me."

The TV turns off and Mum sets her phone down, a frozen level of Candy Crush open for all to see. She's not looking at the phone any longer. "Yeah I rather thought he might be."

George brings his knees up and throws his arms around them. He feels small, like a little kid coming to his mum like this. "So what do I do?"

"What do you want to do?" She asks, one eyebrow raised. If George knew the answer to that, he wouldn't be asking.

"I don't know what to do. That's why I'm asking you. Help me."

Mum doesn't rise to his bait and asks, "Well, do you love him?" getting right to the fucking point.

He feels himself rock back and forth a couple times, gathering the energy to tell her, "I can't be with him, Mum."

"That's not what I asked. Do you love him?," she asks again, eyes intense on him, searching, "Wait, I know how you idiots are: are you in love with him?"

"I don't see how that—" He begins only to have Mum cut him off.

"George."

She gives him the same look she always does when she's wheedling information out of him, when she already knows the answer. Who took the last Poptart, George? Who put that frog in Neve's bed, George? "Yes, I'm in love with him," he caves early. He hasn't built up immunity to that look again.

Her voice is kind when she asks, "So what's the problem?"

How does he even begin to explain? "It doesn't matter that I love him, I'm too much, Mum," his mouth is dry even thinking about it again. "You said it yourself, I feel things too deeply."

"You can't love someone too much, George," she brings her hand up to his arm and it's only with her touch that he feels how tense he's gone, his body frigid on the sofa. She looks kindly at him, all empathy and care in her big eyes, "That's not how it works."

How would she know? It's unkind to think and he regrets it immediately. She and Dad are done. She hasn't had any grand loves in her past, at least not any that she's told George about. What authority does she have to say how love works?

"Dream says you and Dad never actually loved each other." Well, Dream implied it. George

doesn't think he would ever malign George's mother to her son's face.

"That might be true, honey. I'm discovering a lot about myself these days and seeing you and Dream," his head perks up and she huffs a laugh, "Yeah, you're not subtle, either of you," her eyes tease and he feels diaphanous. He remembers feeling see-through in the kitchen, having her watch him banter with Dream, wondering what she might observe. Apparently, she saw enough to come to the correct conclusion. "Seeing the love between you and Dream? Makes me think that I've never had that. Your father and I were never like that."

"So how do you know I won't, I dunno, drown him?"

"I've still had love. I have you," her hand squeezes his arm and he can feel it, can feel her love sink into his skin, "and Neve. Your father gave you two to me, the greatest loves of my life, and I can't imagine a scenario where my love is too much for you. Behavior can be bad, toxic, but—"

"I'm afraid I'll be toxic," he gasps, grateful to finally have the words. That's what it is, he's scared he'll corrupt Dream, or be bad to him, awful. He's scared he'll morph into a worse shade of George who's compelled by his jealousy and possessiveness, that he'll taint all the goodness that is Dream. He's terrified he'll take this beautiful thing between them and bastardize it, make it corrosive until it harms rather than heals.

"Why, would you? Would you tell him who he can and can't talk to?" Mum asks, taking his statement at face value. "Would you try to control what he can and can't do? Would you hurt him, physically or emotionally?"

"No!" George says because the idea of those things repulses him. The thought of anyone doing that to Dream makes bile creep up into his throat, "Oh my god, no!"

"Because controlling him like that wouldn't make him your Dream," Mum explains matter of fact, and he understands. He finds those things repulsive because he doesn't want to do that. He doesn't want a version of Dream that's scared of him, or meek, or subservient like that. He wants a Dream that fights back, a Dream that sticks up for himself, that isn't afraid to tell George when he's wrong or acting like an ass. He wants his Dream, the one that chooses of his own volition to make George his first priority, not forced into it. He wants him freely, of his own choosing.

"Also I'm not abusive," he points out. He's not. Not to his friends, not to his fans, he doesn't like causing pain to people. He likes making people happy.

"Well, there you go. And Dream's not exactly a wilting flower, honey, he'd tell you if you were crossing a line."

"It's not that simple."

"It could be," Mum says softly. His heart aches in a way it never has before. Why are people so obsessed with love if it has side effects like this? "It sounds like you're making it a lot more complicated than it needs to be."

Maybe George is just a complicated guy. He only has that other long term relationship to go off, two years in uni and a break up necessitated by a job offer in Amsterdam. George had no intention of following her there, and she had no intention on asking him. Mum didn't have anything to say when that happened.

"How come you didn't fight this hard when Amanda and I broke up?"

"Oh come on, George. You didn't love Amanda. You weren't yourself with her."

“You and Dad loved Amanda!”

“Your dad liked that he could see himself in you while you were with her,” Mum points out and it’s not like it’s new information, but it still hurts that the only time in his adult life he got along with his father was over a girlfriend he didn’t care one whit for—a girl he didn’t tell he plays Minecraft, a girl he prioritized his friends over, one whom he only called when he needed her to play the role of girlfriend for his parents or when he needed to get his dick wet.

Not his proudest moment, looking back.

“You were so bored with her, you had nothing in common. You were on your best behavior with her at all times, so she never saw the real you. She saw an image of you that you projected.” Funny to see that his performance didn’t fool his mother. She’s always been able to see him. Just like—

“Dream sees the real me.”

“Oh, honey, yeah,” Mum laughs a light sound, gently teasing, “Dream sees more of you than I think you’d ever be comfortable having someone see.”

He groans, frustrated anew, “Then why is this a good idea?”

“Being comfortable isn’t being happy.”

Mum lets that sink in for a moment while she grabs the blanket George has been using to sleep and covers both of them. It’s not the OU blanket, not close to the same texture or color, but there’s still some security in feeling the material over his lap.

Mum takes a deep breath and continues speaking, almost whispering, and George has to lean in to hear her, “I was comfortable for a long, long time, but I wasn’t happy. And I’m just discovering this.”

She looks over at him and her eyes drill into his, “You’re young and you have a chance to be truly happy with someone who loves you and understands you.” She finally looks away, up to the ceiling that George is overly familiar with, and her tone turns teasing, “I don’t know why you’re here in London when you could be letting that man make love to you until your toes curl.”

“Mum!” he gasps out, she could have punched him and he’d be expecting that more.

“What?” Her eyes dance, she’s pleased with herself. George shakes his head, like he can un-hear the words if he tries hard enough.

“You can’t just say that.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re my mum,” he runs a hand through his hair, tempted to pull on it and remind himself he isn’t dreaming.

“I’m tired of not talking about things because they’re uncomfortable, George,” she says and she’s serious again. “Sex is messy and chaotic but it can also be so, so good. It can bring you closer to someone you love and that’s really beautiful.”

George stares down at the coffee table, noting the way the drops of red wine in his glass look under the lamplight. Sex with Dream was like that, elevated to a spiritual experience. It was more than tongue and bodies and orgasms, like he always knew it would be. Whatever happens with Dream,

George knows no one else will ever reach that peak for him. As in many things in his life, Dream is in a class of his own. Fucking S-tier.

“I talked to Dream about sex, you know,” Mum says, apparently not done rearranging his entire world. He feels his eyebrows shoot to his hairline.

“You talked to Dream about sex?”

She smiles kindly, a look of affection around her eyes, “I talked to Dream about a lot of stuff. He’s a smart guy, your man.”

“He’s not my man,” George says reflexively. Part of him doesn’t even mean it, knows it’s true, feels it deep in his bone marrow.

She scoffs and George deserves it this time. She squishes her nose up and says, “I mean, he is, though.”

“Mum.”

Her eyes dance in the low light, somehow the entire day has disappeared while he struggled with himself. A conversation between Dream and his Mum... about sex, of all things. A chill goes down his spine, Dream hadn’t told her about when they... did he?

“What did he say about...” God, he can’t even bring himself to say it to her. His face burns and he knows he’s blushing.

“About sex? Don’t worry,” she pats his leg, “if you two have done that he hasn’t said anything about it to me.”

“We haven’t—” he begins, another reflex to deny deny deny, but well, maybe he can see her point about talking about the messy things, too. He’s a grown man, it’s not like it’s a surprise that he’s had sex, even recently! Lamely, he continues, “Not while you were there.”

“Oh, so after I left?” She’s delighted and he wants to throw up.

“After you called.”

“And...?” She asks when he doesn’t elaborate.

“What?”

“Was it good?”

“Mum this is so weird,” he says, throwing his head into his hands, “I’m not talking to you about—”

“Do I need to call Dream and ask him?”

“No! What is wrong with you? Don’t call Dream and ask what having sex with me was like!”

“I was just teasing, love,” she says and after studying her face, he believes her. It would be pretty far for her to call Dream and ask him something like that. “That’s between you two.”

They sit in a semi-awkward silence for a moment while George grapples with himself and the situation he’s landed in. Talking to his mum of all people about things like sex. The thing is, though, she knows both of them. If he could get past the ick factor, there’s no one alive—besides Sapnap and he would rather move to Antarctica with no wifi than talk to Sapnap about sex with

Dream—that has a better perspective. It's with that in mind, that he timidly says, "It was, you know. Um, good."

"Just good? By the way he was dancing with you in the kitchen, I would have thought it would be life altering."

"Life altering," The phrase strikes him, picks at his memory until it comes to the forefront. There's something important about the words. "That's what Dream said."

"Oh ho, then he's really gone on you."

"I know that. I know—his feelings were never in question, Mum," George says, not that it doesn't delight him to hear someone else corroborate that Dream loves him, but it's unnecessary when he's trying to get to the bottom of the issues keeping them apart, "Nor mine, I think."

"Then what are you so worried about, love?"

"What if we break up?" he says, knowing he's borrowing courage from the wine. These thoughts have been in the secrecy of his mind for so long. "What if I really let myself love him and I'm so happy with him and then he decides he doesn't feel that way and breaks up with me?"

"Well, I don't think that could ever happen, but even if it does," her arm waves around the flat she's turned into her home, "here's proof that life goes on after a relationship ends, George."

"I just can't lose him."

"So fight for him. But if something happens and you do break up, there's a life afterward. I'm learning so much about myself. I'm excited about my life for the first time in years. I learned so much about myself when I married your dad, and now I'm learning even more by not being married to him," Mum's hand lands on his leg again, a weight that backs up the statement she makes.

"I'm indulging in myself for the first time. I'm your mother and I've adored being your mother, but I'm not making decisions on what's best for my kids anymore. You're grown. Neve is grown. There's no husband to worry about and no kids to mold myself around, I only have to answer to myself and that's... so freeing. I'm learning to paint. I'm actually not bad at it. I've been drinking tea instead of coffee and it turns out I like it more. Life goes on after a break up, honey. You have other friends to help, you have me and Neve. We would be there for you, help you pick yourself back up. Through all this I'm finding friends I didn't know I needed. I adore Sapnap, and Dream has helped me so much, he helped me get this place, he got me to go to therapy—"

"Dream got you into therapy?" George can't help but interrupt. It's painful to hear how happy she sounds, how excited. He wishes he'd been paying more attention, that maybe he could have picked up on this a long time ago, saved her some heartache.

"He did. He said it would be a good idea, and he wasn't wrong."

Dream rarely *is* wrong, but oh boy the times he is... Can he count on Dream being right in this scenario? So much more is riding on it than usual. More than their careers.

"I'm too much," George says again, bringing his legs back into his chest and hugging them closely to his chest, "I'm going to need too much and want too much and—"

"And Dream won't give you those things?"

“I want to be around him all the time!” George wants to scream, why does no one get it? He feels like a crazy person! “I never want to leave his side. I want to follow him into the office and watch him edit and I want to follow him into the shower and to his parents’ house and, and that’s just not healthy.”

“Well, let him set boundaries, then,” Mum says like he’s being unreasonable, like he’s a teenager again and she won’t let him stay up late coding Minecraft plug-ins, “And respect his boundaries. That’s not too hard. You already make changes to help him, right? You had pictures of his face before he face revealed and you didn’t spread those around on the internet—”

“Of course not!”

“So he set a boundary then and you respected it. You can do that again. If he doesn’t want you following him into the shower, he’ll tell you, you’ll listen, and that’ll be that.”

“You make it sound so easy,” he exhales deeply, trying to release the pent up frustration.

“You make it sound so hard!” Mum counters, “It’s not. It’s just talking. You and Dream are so good at talking, you just need to actually talk about this. What’s okay and what’s not okay.”

She gathers herself, sits back on the sofa and crosses her legs before she opens her mouth to speak again, “You can’t live your life scared. The bigger things are, the scarier they are, I get that. And this is potentially the scariest thing you’ve ever faced. But think about it like this: Dream didn’t let you down when you followed him on Youtube. Dream didn’t let you down when you followed him to Florida. Statistically, and I know you love your statistics, he won’t let you down here, either.”

“Okay, I’ll—I’ll think about it.”

Exhaustion hits him like a tidal wave and he rubs his eyes.

“One last thing, and here’s what I want you to take away from this conversation, George Henry. You are complete in and of yourself, but if you sequester yourself away, then you’re doing a disservice to yourself and to Dream. You don’t want to wake up at seventy and realize you missed out on something extraordinary.”

Later that night George tucks himself into the sofa bed in his mother’s little flat and sleep doesn’t come. It’s not that the bed is uncomfortable, though it is, but the conversation with Mum keeps bouncing around in his head.

Should he be with Dream? Is being with Dream worth the risk of losing Dream? Of losing the life he’s currently living, this version of George who lives in Florida with his best friends and is happy? Because once he makes a decision, he can’t ever go back. He can’t fit his toes in a footprint he left in the mud a year ago, it’ll be long gone.

He thinks back to that conversation with Dream in his room, it feels like an eternity has passed since then. Dream was right about one thing—they can’t maintain this equilibrium. In all his worries and spiraling thoughts about embarking on a relationship with Dream, it was never Dream

who ruined everything. In George's mind, it was always George who decided if they were friends, or more, and Dream who decided if they were nothing. Always Dream who made the final call on the relationship.

George can't imagine ever breaking up with Dream, he can't picture any set of circumstances where he tells Dream they can't be together any longer. Nothing about Dream as a person, his morals and values, would intercept with George's absolute deal breakers. Dream wouldn't cheat. Dream wouldn't hurt him. Dream wouldn't demean or mock him. So there's not a chance in hell that George lets him go voluntarily. Ultimately, Dream has the power here.

And that's the scariest thing of all. To have no power over his own happiness, in the long run. But he does, doesn't he? That was Mum's whole point, that if things don't work out, he'll move on. He'll find some post-Dream version of George that makes him almost as happy. Some version of himself he can live with, feel okay about. Just thinking about it makes his stomach churn over in agony.

He hasn't done a lot of baking before, but he's learned that if you pour too much of something in, you can't take it back. All you can do is pour too much of everything else to balance it out. That's what Dream does, he balances George out. All this time George has been scared that he's too much and his talk with Dream taught him that maybe Dream's too much as well. That maybe they're just the right amount for each other.

He won't know until he takes that chance.

"Hey," he says quietly, aware that the walls are thin and he doesn't want to wake Mum up.

"Hi," Dream says, voice just as soft even though he doesn't have any reason to keep his noise level down. "Everything okay?"

For once, everything is okay. He's at peace. "Yeah, but I'm flying home tomorrow. Can you pick me up?"

"Sure, of course I can. What time are you getting in?"

"I dunno," George says, he hasn't gotten this far into the plan. "I haven't bought my ticket yet."

This, of course, makes Dream laugh. "Want me to buy one for you? I'll forward the confirmation to you."

George rolls his eyes and hears the unmistakable sound of a keyboard clicking in the background, "You're already doing it, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Dream says, shameless, "Can't help it."

"Does this mean you're ready to talk? When you get back, I mean?" He sounds nervous and George can't blame him. He's nervous too and he's the one ready to talk.

"Yeah, Dream."

“Any clues you want to throw my way so I know where to set my expectations?”

“No,” George says simply, knowing it will annoy Dream. He hears an amused sigh from the other end of the call and takes pity on him. “But we can talk right away, when I land. No drawing it out.”

“Should I ask Sapnap to go to Punz’ house?”

“That’s up to you.”

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

whew boy this got away from me. 14k words and i split the chapter into two. So, epilogue is coming soon but i'm going to go ahead and mark this done.

i recommend you go back and re-read the whole thing for maximum whoomph but you do you.

thanks to everyone who's been along for the journey--i've loved every comment and kudos and twitter mention and tumblr ask. you guys are so sweet and have made me feel so welcome in this community. feel free to come talk to me about anything--@scoops404

Mum shows exactly zero surprise when George announces his flight in the morning. He was already up, sofa bed returned to regularly scheduled programing and meager suitcase packed when she wandered out of her bedroom with the sun.

“So you made a decision, then?” she asks, plugging in the kettle. The coffee machine sits lonely on the counter. He wonders if she’ll send it to a nice farm where it’ll have fields to run around.

“I’ve got to talk to Dream first,” he tells her, but there’s a frisson of growing excitement in his gut that he’s sure is leaking onto his face.

“Of course, darling,” she says, not very subtle in the smile she’s sporting. “I’m very happy for you.”

“Mum, I haven’t—”

“I know,” she says, waving her hand. “But a mother can tell.”

He groans from his seat at the table. “Don’t tell him.”

“On my honor,” she says, placing a hand over her heart. She’s teasing him, she’s always teasing him, but she’s also sincere. They stare at each other for a minute until her face perks up. “Oh, I have something for him. Your man.”

This peaks George’s interest, what could she possibly have for him? She walks out of the kitchen, calling over her shoulder, “Dream made me promise him something, come help me get it.”

He follows her into the bedroom, the only space in the flat he hasn’t explored. It’s as tiny and comfy as the rest of the space, gray walls and a huge window that lets the natural light in. Propped up against the wall under the window, Mum grabs a picture frame. It’s wrapped in brown paper, but obvious in its size and shape that it can’t be anything else.

“Do you have room in your suitcase for it?” Mum hands it over to him, hope written all over her face.

Yeah, if he leaves everything else here, maybe. “I might have to re-arrange some stuff,” like maybe

the laws of physics. “What is it?”

She laughs mysteriously, “You’ll see.”

Traveling this time is a nightmare. Free of the adrenalin that guided him on his route to England, he’s left with his fatigue for company on the way home. Dream texts him sporadically, like he, too, can’t wait until they’re reunited. George reads the anxiety behind his words, reassuring himself that things will work out the way they’re meant to, soon enough.

Customs almost gives him a problem when they see his visa and how quickly he returned to England. “Family emergency,” he tells the agent, and it doesn’t feel like a lie in his mouth. She nods acerbically and finally he’s back.

The humidity greets him before Dream can. He shucks his hoodie off, and peels his eyes for Dream’s car, fingers tapping steadily on the plastic handle in his grip, nervousness and excitement mixing unpleasantly in his gut. Smooth enough like they planned it, Dream pulls up to the curb and pops the trunk. Before he can get out and tackle the baggage, George lifts the thing in himself. Dream still gets out, a puppy pout on his face when he sees George already took care of it.

“Don’t worry, you can carry it inside when we get home,” George says, teasing. Dream drops the pout and George takes a second to just look at him standing in the busy street. So different from when he first touched down in Florida all those weeks ago, the man who was always supposed to greet him finally here. Finally doing it right. He missed him. “Are you going to hug me or not?”

The apprehension hanging off Dream’s shoulders eases and he opens his arms widely, accepting George as he throws himself against that broad chest. Now he’s home. He inhales deeply, lulled by Dream’s familiar smell. God, he could live off that alone.

“I missed you,” Dream whispers into his temple. His breath makes George’s hair dance, tickling his skin. His heart beats wildly under his ribs.

“Not as much as I missed you.”

A car honks behind them and Dream releases him with a secret smile. They climb into the car and Dream drives away.

George promised they would talk right away, and he takes his promises to Dream seriously. He just—he doesn’t know how to start. There’s no wine in his system this time and he finds it difficult enough to talk about these things with the alcohol, doing it stone cold sober and in regards to the most pivotal moment in his life leaves him scared shitless.

Dream takes pity on him when they sit in silence for a long moment and asks, “How’s Kate

doing?” Like he doesn’t know, like he hasn’t been in contact with her. It makes George want to smile.

“She’s good. Seems healthy, I dunno,” he says, and then with respect to their friendship, the strange but undeniable connection his mother and his best friend share, he adds honestly, “Better than she’s been in a long time.”

“That’s good to hear,” Dream says easily, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

“Did you not talk to her?” George can’t help but ask, mildly confused. Is Dream just asking about her out of politeness? For the thin excuse he gave to put space between the two of them? He’s sure Mum mentioned speaking with Dream.

“No, I did,” Dream answers, quick to assure him, “But people can say things and not mean them.”

Yikes.

“What did she say about me?” George asks, curious. He loves that Dream and Mum have a relationship outside of him, that his mum especially can confide things in Dream that she can’t with her own children. He knows how good Dream is at talking, comforting, everything really, but man he would love to be a fly on the wall just once when they’re talking. “I mean, when you guys talked?”

“Nothing. Just that you were there. Don’t worry, if you told her any secrets, she didn’t give them up,” Dream’s words could have been harsh, a twist of the tongue and that sentence could have been punishing. But he says it with reassurance, like he knows George’s secrets are as precious as gold. More so. The two of them have always dealt in the same currency.

Dream wouldn’t want to hear his secrets from anybody else, anyway. He wants them straight from the source. He wants George to give them up willingly. And fuck if George doesn’t want that, too. He’s ready. “She wouldn’t.”

“I know. I love that about her.”

“She told me you two talked about sex,” George hears himself saying the second the thought crosses his mind. He wants Dream to explain, he wants Dream to tell him every thought he’s ever had about sex—sex with George, sex with men, with women, his every thought and whim and desire so George can twist himself to fit, to give him everything. To make it so good he’ll never leave. To admit that George is the best, S-tier, the only one for him. Ruin him for even thoughts of sex with someone else. God, he needs to stop.

“We did,” Dream admits, an arrogant smirk on that handsome face, “Does that shock you?”

“No,” George denies, the instinct strong to not admit to anything in Dream’s games of shocking a response out of him. He reconsiders, “Yes. A little.”

He sits back in the passenger seat, pulls his knees up to his chest around the seatbelt and elaborates, “She wants to be more honest about things with me, talk about the messy things, too.”

“Good for her. I think you’ve got a pretty good mom, George.”

“Yeah, I know. Yours is good, too.”

“I know.”

“Mum advocated for you,” George says, wanting Dream to know Mum is rooting for them, that she has Dream’s back. He needs Dream to know that Mum is supportive of them. “Because of course we talked about you.”

“Did she? What’d she say?”

He takes a deep breath. Here he goes: “That I need to give you a chance. That I shouldn’t miss out just because I’m scared.”

“Smart woman,” Dream remarks, but George doesn’t react. He has to keep going, has to get this all out now. He needs Dream to know that he *gets* it now.

“—That sometimes relationships end, but that doesn’t mean it’s the end of the world. She told me she learned a lot from splitting from Dad. I didn’t think of it that way, that it could be freeing. She said even though it ended, she’s gained more than she’s lost,” he picks at the fraying fabric of his sweatpants along his left knee. “She actually named you and Sapnap there, that she’s glad to count you as friends.”

Dream clears his throat and George wonders what he’s thinking. He wants access to his thoughts, now more than ever before. Is he picking up on what George is hinting at? Does he still—has he changed his mind after thinking the last few days? Is it too late?

George shakes his head to clear that bad line of thought and something more pleasant rises to take its place. He pictures the little brown package Mum placed in his care. “I have something in my suitcase for you. Mum sent it along, said she made you a promise.”

Dream’s eyes turn from guarded to anticipation, he briefly looks over at George to share the excitement, “Oh, fuck yeah, we’re hanging it in the living room!”

“How do you already know what it is?” George asks. Did she send a picture of it to Dream? She didn’t even tell him if it’s a painting or a framed photo or anything really. And Dream already has plans to hang it up in their house?

“I don’t know what it is,” Dream says, answering that mystery. “I just know it’s a painting she made for us.”

He knows Mum is getting into painting, he sat through her planning a class with Neve. He listened to her tell them how far away the studio is when she went over the neighborhood. Somehow he didn’t think she had already started. She’s already got a painting ready to send to Dream? He doesn’t remember seeing any paints or supplies in the flat, no Bob Ross set up under studio lights. No easel or palette or, or whatever else artists use. He’s sure he’d know it if he saw it.

“So you don’t even know if it’s good or not?”

“It’s not about if it’s good or not, George,” Dream makes an offended sound under his breath and George knows that sound, knows every sound Dream can make. “Kate made it for us, we’re hanging it where we’ll see it every day.”

His heart breaks in the best way, like the kind of breaking things have to do to grow—how gardeners sheer back bushes so they can grow bigger the next year. He feels his heart break and triple in size all at once. How did he get so lucky to have a man like this love him?

“How do you just do stuff like that?” the words fall off his tongue without permission from his brain, “How do you love so easily?”

Dream shrugs as best as he can while driving, he doesn't take his eyes off the road, always keeping George safe. He finally says, "I could give you some philosophical bullshit, but honestly, I think I just kinda fling myself out there with people I connect to and hope they catch me." His eyes slide over to George momentarily before landing back on the road in front of them, "Hurts like hell when they don't."

"Do I catch you?" George is earnest in his question. He wants to know if he's good for Dream. Because that's the biggest issue, isn't it? If he can't catch Dream, then he's just using him, he's letting Dream do all the work, take on too much like he always does, and George won't be part of that. He won't drain Dream dry.

Not a party to George's inner thoughts, Dream looks over again, mischief on his face, and asks, "Is this a pitcher/catcher set up? Because I'll pitch, I'll catch, whatever you want." He laughs at his own joke and George can't help smiling in return. He loves a good sexual joke and Dream loves to indulge him.

It also brings up some possibilities for later that George is... eager to explore.

"No," George tells him, keeping his tone serious and getting back to the conversation. If they get off track now, he's worried they'll never get resolution, never fall in together. "Not a set up."

Like he always does, Dream reads him, and answers honestly, "Then absolutely you catch me. You catch me more than anyone."

"You catch me too," George tells him. The butterflies in his stomach settle a little with Dream's admission. *More than anyone.* That's what he said. George catches Dream more than anyone. That's what he wants, to be Dream's biggest helper, biggest fan, biggest collaborator. He wants so much of him and to give so much to him.

"I know I do," Dream says, confident. "And I love doing that for you. I'm still hoping you'll let me do more than that."

There's a small hole in the fabric across his right knee. He thinks he can probably stick his entire pinkie finger through it. He's proud of how smooth his voice sounds when he asks, "What does 'more than that' entail?"

"I hope you let me grow with you," Dream says and goosebumps run down George's arms. "I hope you let me have a place in your life. I hope it becomes 'our life' and we get to be happy in it."

That sounds pretty good, our life.

"I hope I don't hurt you," George says after a beat. All he truly wants in this world, is for Dream to be happy. And safe. And if George gets in the way of that, if George is the one inflicting pain onto Dream, that's the worst case scenario. That can't happen.

"You will," Dream says easily, almost casually. "But I'll hurt you too and we'll talk about it, learn from it, heal, and grow stronger for it."

Pride burns in George's throat for Dream. How has he been so lucky to watch him grow into this mature man? How many growing pains has George watched Dream endure, to learn these lessons? The public lashings and hate campaigns that turned droves of people against his best friend, this soft-hearted man. He can't believe the beautiful man in front of him used to be the snot nosed kid arguing with him about coding. Now he's turned into this fine man, someone George admires, his equal and partner, wise beyond his years and generous with his resources. George loves him so

much.

They'll heal. They'll grow. The two of them. George isn't naive enough to think there won't be arguments, fights, disagreements, just as there are within their friendship. They've had to learn to navigate those, especially across an ocean with only the local wifi keeping them tethered to one another. It would have been easy to turn off his phone, log out of discord, become untraceable, deny access to Dream if they got into an argument big enough. But, that never happened. They learned to communicate. Dream taught him, like he taught him to drive. Like George taught Dream to code, guided him at least.

Dream allows him quiet while his mind unravels like a ball of string. He lets the Florida sunshine warm his skin through the window, wonders if he'll find new freckles in the mirror tonight when he brushes his teeth.

"Mum said you made her go to therapy."

There's a snort of derision from the driver's seat and George turns from watching the palm trees appear and disappear in the window to see Dream check his blind spot before switching lanes. "I suggested she go to therapy and talk about things with a professional instead of relying solely on a twenty two year old who didn't go to college."

"You've never suggested I go to therapy," George says, unsure himself what he even means saying this. Did he want Dream to tell him to go to therapy? Did he want Dream to encourage him? Did he think something was wrong with him?

"You could," Dream says, again calm and patient and a balm to George's soul. "Do you want to?"

"Do you think I should?"

"I think no one has ever left therapy and been like 'that made me actively worse.' But I also didn't think you would be receptive to that suggestion."

Dream's careful when he says the last bit and George hates that. He hates that Dream could ever think he wouldn't be receptive to anything he suggests. He hoards Dream's feedback on his videos, knowing everything he says will make the video better. He might get annoyed in the moment, not wanting to re-do an edit he already had to force himself to do, but he always listens. Always goes back and does it with Dream's suggestion, and the video is always better for it. "Why?"

"Because you don't like to do things like that. Or admit you can't handle something," George's stomach sinks. Dream's not wrong, but... it still hurts to hear, "I didn't think you would listen and you would just get mad at me."

He takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry I made you feel that way."

"Are you going to go to therapy?"

A great question. He's never felt like he needed it before. No big traumas in his past or anything. He's been doing fine with just his friends and—well, maybe it would have helped to have an objective person to turn to in all this mess of the last few days.

It certainly wouldn't hurt to have someone objective keep him in check, make sure he doesn't hurt Dream. They'll heal, they'll grow. He holds onto those words like a promise. He firmly believes they'll do both of those things, but a therapist might speed up the process, cut through the bullshit and hurt feelings to get to the truth faster. George wants to speed-run a healthy relationship.

“I might. I also, like—if we, you know, do this,” he watches Dream’s eyes widen where they watch the road, taking in the realization on his face as George chooses his words deliberately, “then I think I’d want us to go to therapy, like together.”

“Why?” Dream asks, but there’s no malice in his tone, only curiosity.

“Just check in. I don’t know, maybe that’s stupid, maybe that’s—”

“No, no, I’m not saying it’s stupid,” Dream slides his hand off the steering wheel and over to interlace his fingers with George’s, like he’s been wanting to and now feels certain of his welcome. “It might be helpful to have someone there to help, a mediator. If it’ll make you feel more comfortable or that, I dunno, I’m being honest with you—”

“It’s not that I think you’re dishonest, Dream,” George is quick to say.

“I know that,” Dream squeezes his fingers, “But you still have trouble believing it, don’t you?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s—” feeling brave, George brings Dream’s fingers up to his mouth and kisses them, “How do you always get it?”

“I don’t always, but you’re George,” he says, like George is a class of his own. In Dream’s mind, he probably is.

“I wouldn’t need us to go like every day or every week or whatever, just,” George stares at Dream’s profile, his strong jaw. George wants to know the exact angle of his nose, he wants to see the equation in front of him, tattoo it on his body for safekeeping. “I really don’t want to mess this up.”

“Okay. Then we’ll do everything in our power not to,” Dream agrees, playing with George’s fingers still in his grasp, “We’ll be honest with each other and with our therapist and we’ll work on it and ourselves to give this the best chance we can give it.” He turns his head away from the road again, looking for agreement. “Right?”

George can give that, easily, “Right.”

He turns back to the front, Adam’s apple bobbing when he swallows. George watches the movement and almost misses Dream saying, “Because you’re important to me, George. I’m sorry if I didn’t make that really clear before. I’m in love with you,” and oh his whole body still turns warm when he hears those words from Dream, “but more than that, your happiness and safety and, like, person-hood are important to me.”

“Person-hood?” George asks, confused. That feels like it’s coming out of left field. When was his person-hood in question?

“I don’t want you to feel like you’re just a part of me,” Dream says quietly, but sure, like he’s been thinking about this. “Like, you’re *George*. You’re your own person and you don’t have to be with me just because I say you have to, or whatever. Like, I don’t think of you as a possession or trophy. I just, I did some thinking while you were gone, too, and I didn’t like how some of my behavior came across.”

“Thank you for saying that,” George says, thinking that they’re already nailing this communication thing. They’re healing. They’re growing. “I didn’t feel that way, that you were making me a possession, but I appreciate it.”

“I like the things that make you George. If you were just a part of me, it’d be boring. Predictable. I

like that I can't always know what you'll do. I like that there's still a million things to learn about you."

"I like that, too."

"Besides," Dream says, a bit of that arrogance George hates to love and loves to hate coloring his voice, "I wanted you to choose me. I wanted you to want to be with me. I wouldn't want it if—"

"If you felt like you forced me into it," George finishes for him. Dream nods. "You aren't forcing me now, Dream. I want it. I want to do this with you. I'm—I'm all in, okay?"

The most beautiful smile lights up Dream's face and George feels tears sting the back of his eyes and sinuses. Dream takes a huge breath of relief, like he can't believe it, relief and elation radiating off of him. His hand squeezes George's fingers.

"Really?" Dream asks, like he needs to hear it one more time. Like he needs the confirmation before he really lets himself believe it.

George brings their hands back up to his lips and kisses Dream's fingers again. "Yeah, really. I— You know it was never that I didn't want this," he lets Dream re-arrange their hands so he can bring them to his own lips. His mouth sears against George's skin. "Just that I was scared."

"It's okay to be scared," Dream tells him.

"I know. I know that now."

"So we'll take this slow," Dream says, hand a bit sweaty in George's now with their combined heat and the Florida weather. Dream's poor aircon is working overdrive in this little car and while the sweat is gross between them, George won't give the hand up. It's his to hold.

"Yeah, I think so," George agrees with the pace. They need to adjust to this, find a therapist, at least.

"Do I get to call you my boyfriend?"

"Yes, but not to the internet," George says after thinking about it for a second. He's proud to be with Dream, eager for everyone to know just how important he is to Dream, that he's essential, but... not yet. There's something terrifying about the world knowing about the fragile thing between them, more than they already do. He wants to feel established before they break the internet. "Just us for now. And Sapnap. And our families."

"But, eventually?" Dream asks and maybe George is reading into it, but he senses a small amount of insecurity there.

"Yes, eventually you can tell everyone DNF is real," George says with a playful roll of his eyes, hoping to derail Dream's thoughts and assure him that he's not ashamed or anything.

It backfires a bit, because Dream says, "You know this isn't about, like DNF, or—"

"Of course I know that, you idiot," George tells him. "This is more than shipping on the internet. These are our lives we're... intermingling."

"I'd like to intermingle with you," Dream looks at him, eyebrows flapping up and down in a way that shouldn't be flattering but somehow is on Dream.

“God, I hate you,” George says, meaning the exact opposite. His affection for Dream is through the skylight.

“You love me,” Dream calls him out, making George grin, “I’m totally seducing you right now.” Dream looks quickly between the road and George’s face, multitasking not killing them with metaphorically killing George, with an arrow through his heart, “Oh my god, I am. It’s working!” He laughs boisterously, triumphant and incredulous. “You want to bone me.”

George swallows his embarrassment, hates that he was caught so easily, “I thought we were taking this slowly?”

Dream’s amusement turns to a pout, “So I don’t get to eat your ass again?”

“I mean, let’s not be crazy. We aren’t monks,” George rolls it back, he wants to experience Dream again. He wants to participate more, reciprocate whole-heartedly. He wants to touch Dream thoroughly, learn every inch of him. “I think my ass wants more than your tongue this time.”

“Oh, fuck. For real?”

“Yeah, Dream. I mean, if you want to.”

“Oh my god, of course I do.”

They meet each other’s smiles and George cheekily says, “No telling my mother about this later.”

“George, if it’s as good as I think it’s going to be, you’ll be lucky if there’s anyone on the planet who doesn’t know how good it is between us.”

He had to fall in love with a chronic over-sharer, didn’t he? He makes a mental note to set some of those boundaries his mother was so passionate about. Later, though. For now, he wants nothing but Dream.

“Sapnap is going to move in with Punz.”

“He’s got a whole separate floor,” Dream laughs, “he’ll be fine.”

The sight of their house fills George with warmth. For living here so short a time, it feels more like home than he’s had in a very long time. If home is where the heart is, then this is his.

George reaches up to the garage door opener and presses the button, his favorite part of the return trip home. It hits different this time. He’s opening more than just the garage, he’s opening himself up to a whole new world. Dream maneuvers the car into the garage skillfully and George notes Sapnap’s missing Tesla. Guess Dream got him to visit Punz after all.

“I made dinner,” Dream says, while he opens his door. George follows him, ready to be in the safety of their home. Dream fumbles with his key fob to pop the trunk and unloads the suitcase. George doesn’t even try to take it from him.

“You didn’t have to do that,” George says, meaning both the suitcase and the dinner. Dream takes

such good care of him.

“I needed something to do,” Dream admits, a shy smile in the darkness of the garage, “I was going crazy.” George can imagine the aftermath of their phone call clearly—Dream anticipating his return, unable to sleep with the unknown hanging over his head, throwing himself into a project to distract his brain. He thinks he’ll probably find the manifestations of Dream’s anxiety around the house in the form of hoovered floors and bleached bathrooms. Sapnap hates when Dream cleans the hallway bathroom, but he never forbids him from doing it.

“And you chose dinner?” Amongst other things, he’s sure. But he’ll let Dream play it cool. They both know he sees right through that.

George walks towards the door, opening it for Dream to bring the baggage behind him. Breathing in the comforting smell, George almost cries right there. This is where he belongs. He’s never leaving again.

“I wanted to do something for you,” Dream tells him, bringing his attention back to his partner. “Like, either way. I needed you to know I care about you either way,” huge green eyes look dark in the low light of the open floor plan, and George has rarely seen them so serious. Dream continues, “That I wasn’t just going to abandon you if you decided not to, you know.”

“Dream,” he says, putting his entire heart into the word. His favorite word.

“Well,” Dream’s voice cracks, a tight look around his eyes when he slaps his hands together and over exaggeratedly says, “I’m sure glad that didn’t happen!”

“You idiot,” George breathes out. Suddenly, Dream’s right in front of him, the suitcase abandoned on the floor behind them. George lifts a hand up to his cheek and places it delicately there, stubble rough under his fingertips, the bite enough to remind George he’s awake, that this is real. “Sweet idiot, though.”

“That’s me,” his nose scrunches up, making the lines around his eyes pop. He’s flawed, but he’s perfect at the same time.

“My little himbo,” George says and pats his cheek a little too hard. Dream rolls his eyes but he can’t hide the affection in his gaze. He’s happy. George is making him happy. God, that’s all he’s ever wanted. If it’s this easy to make him happy, call him an idiot and pat his cheek, he’s not sure why he held back for so long.

“Sit down,” Dream says and takes a step back, “I’ll heat it up.”

“Hold on,” George climbs onto the bar stool, making a show of bringing his phone out, “just let me leave that yelp review.”

“Shut up, asshole,” he says with his ass hanging out of the fridge, a huge pot of something George can’t identify in his arms. Those perfect arms strain as he lifts the pot and George’s stomach turns over. He can watch now. He’s encouraged to watch.

His eyes don’t stray from Dream as he moves the pot to the stove and turns the knob to on. “Hope you like chili,” Dream says with a half shrug.

Truthfully, George isn’t sure he’s ever tried chili before. He’s not even sure if the American version of chili is the same as it is in England. But if Dream made it for him, made it for even the alternate universe George who rejected him, he’s sure he’ll love it. Or, he’ll put up a good front. He’ll eat it with a smile on his face.

Dream gives the big pot a stir, like a cartoon witch brewing a potion and the thought makes him laugh. Neve would appreciate the imagery. He subtly takes a picture to send to her later.

“Tastes better this way,” he says in explanation, nodding his head at the microwave. “That thing doesn’t heat it up evenly enough. You get gross cold patches of ground beef.”

George couldn’t give less of a shit. At this point, he’d eat anything Dream put in front of him and said he made it for him. Everything tastes better when Dream makes it. Like, scientifically. He’s not biased. Sapnap agrees.

With a look over his shoulder at George, Dream replaces the pot lid and turns abruptly, leaning against the counter top with his arms crossed in front of him. He stares George down, their eyes meeting and, fuck, George can’t hold anything back. He’s so happy in this moment. Dream loves him and he loves Dream and he’s allowed to make Dream happy.

No one but Dream is allowed to see the soppy look on his face.

“Come on,” Dream says with a nod of his head, “lets put some music on while it heats up.”

Dream finds a song on his phone and George fights the smile threatening to take over his entire face. Badboyhalo’s “Muffin” begins playing and George tries in vain to hide how funny he finds Dream. He doesn’t want his ego to get too big. They’ve only been together for less than an hour.

Those big arms spread in a gesture and Dream beckons him forward. Without reservation, George walks into them. “Oh you’re angling to dance with me?” he reaches up and places his hands on Dream’s shoulders, massaging them a bit. He doesn’t like the feel of the knots in his muscles, he’ll have to do something about that later. For now, he can’t help but be a little shit, “Dream, do you like like me?”

Dream’s laugh is worth it. He’s gorgeous when he laughs and George covets putting that expression on his face. Green eyes stare into his and he admits, “I might, just a little.”

Ridiculousness aside, the answer still sends a thrill down George’s spine. He lets Dream lead them, gently swaying together in their kitchen while the smell of chili starts to permeate the room. His heart pounds in his own ears, bringing a flush up his neck and into his cheeks. This close to Dream isn’t enough, he wants to be even closer. Why not? They can do that now.

George reaches his hands up from Dream’s shoulders to his face and brings it down, until Dream gets the idea and runs with it. His lips land lightly on George’s. It’s a soft kiss, careful, nothing like the last time they did this.

Perfection. Dream’s hands feel larger than life on his back, pulling him closer and closer until George wants to reverse mitosis inside Dream.

Dream pulls back and George doesn’t want to open his eyes, doesn’t want it to end. He wants to keep kissing Dream forever, over and over again. He wants to keep these arms around him, keep this heartbeat against his own, wants to stand on Dream’s feet and let him move them, he wants to dance with Dream through life. Dream doesn’t back away too far, just brings his mouth to George’s ear and confesses, “I’ve been wanting to do that since the last time we danced here.”

He opens his eyes in time to see Dream pull away. There’s no one else here, no need for secrets, no need for whispers other than to make George shiver. In keeping with theme, George grants a confession of his own, “I’ve been wanting to do that since before you grabbed my ass and kept talking about your boner.”

Dream huffs a laugh and squeezes George impossibly closer. “Yeah?” his hips grind tentatively into George’s, he’s not hard, but it’s enough of a suggestion that he starts going that way. “I guess I can show it to you this time, since you’re so obsessed with me.”

And, what the fuck, it’s not like that’s a lie. And he wants to see his dick again. He wants to see it hard and up close, wants to taste it, smell it, fuck—the only regret he has from their night together is that he didn’t get to touch Dream, make him come. He wants that dick and he wants it now.

“Yeah, alright.” His faux casualness doesn’t fool Dream who looks down hungrily at him.

George’s stomach chooses that moment to rumble loudly and though he’d rather be led by other body parts, the sound wins out and Dream makes them eat.

There’s a buzz of electricity in the air that won’t dissipate, an unspoken understanding that this is the beginning of a very long night, a very long life together, and they’re just getting started. He finds himself settling into the feeling, so sure he would be scared away by it, and some part of him is scared, no two ways about it, but instead of making him want to run for the hills and save himself, it makes him want to crawl right back into Dream’s arms for shelter. He wants their life to start now.

Really, though, when he thinks about it, their life together started a long time ago.

The thought makes George rest back on the stool, Dream’s arm around his shoulders because he couldn’t bare to let him go, eating with their dominant hands.

“George?”

“Hmm,” George scrapes the bottom of his bowl with his spoon, deciding the chili isn’t the worst American food he’s tried. Dream made enough for a family of ten, so he’ll be back for seconds and thirds later on. He’s planning on being busy with Dream for a while, no time to cook full on meals for either of them.

Curiosity pings at him and George turns to look at Dream. He’s staring over at George, nothing new there, his face pensive and George places his spoon down in his bowl and gives Dream his undivided attention. The air around Dream tells him from experience that he’s about to open another line of dialogue they need to address and George prepares himself.

“Do you mind if I—How long—When did—” Dream struggles to put his thoughts into words and George lets his hand fall to rest on Dream’s thigh, a silent show of support and patience, “How long have you known? Or like, when did you know?”

An open ended question, but somehow George knows exactly what he means. The ice maker in the fridge makes a loud groan and George says, “I don’t have an exact date, Dream.”

“Guess,” Dream presses, his face perilously close and earnest. The George of Yesterday would withdraw in on himself at this, would change the subject, crack a joke and make the conversation move on. Today’s George reaches within himself and tries to come up with the correct words to make Dream understand. Today’s George wants Dream to understand.

He takes a hesitant breath and says, “It’s been in a box in the back of my mind for... a while.” Dream’s thigh pulses under his palm. “It’s been one of those things I didn’t like to think about.”

“Really?”

“Not in a bad way, or like a shameful way. I’m not ashamed of how I feel about you,” George

means that. It's never been about the feelings he has for Dream, just the way they overwhelm him, the way he falls too deeply into them.

"Then what—"

George turns his head and meets Dream's eyes. "I just didn't think anything would ever come of it. No sense in wallowing in something you couldn't help," it sounds so depressing when he puts it like that. George moves his hand from the muscular thigh to Dream's hand and intertwines their fingers. He really wants Dream to understand this, "I didn't want to resent you for something you couldn't help."

"George," Dream says his name like George says Dream's, like it's a question and an answer, a prayer and a condemnation. "You could have said something."

And watched the pity play out in real time across Dream's face? Or hear it in his voice over a discord call, bring him so much shame he couldn't talk to Dream for a period of time, keep him from indulging in the only thing bringing him joy during those dark days in his model flat, shared discord calls with Dream. He knows himself, he would have pulled back in self-preservation, would have given himself restrictions to not annoy Dream, drain too much of his time if he was unwanted. No, no, he couldn't have said anything. Especially without knowing Dream felt the same.

Confessing his unrequited feelings would have driven them apart.

He doesn't want to talk about himself any longer. That dark past is just that, the past. They have a bright future to look forward to now. He's curious about Dream, though. If it wasn't their night together, how long has Dream known? He wets his lips and asks, "When did you—"

"I don't really know, either," Dream's big shoulders shrug and George feels the vibrations down into his fingers from every point they're connected, "I finally put a name to it and, like, *recognized* it recently, but before we—" he squeezes George's hand and George takes that to mean when they hooked up, "But the feelings were there the whole time. I just didn't know that's what it was. You were always just George and you were different, special, but I didn't know why."

To his credit, Dream always made George feel special. That was one of the many, many reasons he fell for him so hard. Dream made him a priority, made him feel valued, respected, it's hard not to fall for that.

"You're the reason I know I'm not straight," Dream says a moment later, his voice low in contemplation and confession.

George thinks of his arguments with Neve, thinks of a couple drunken nights in uni, thinks of a carefully labeled folder on his PC where he keeps—well, special videos...

"Robin Hood is the reason I know I'm not straight," George says, and Dream's head whips around.

"What?"

George raises the shoulder of the arm not connected to Dreams, "A long standing argument with my sister."

"So, you've known for a while that you're...?" Dream's searching for answers that George isn't sure he has... looking for the lore he's so obsessed with.

They don't talk about stuff like this. Well, they *didn't* talk about stuff like this. George has always

been notoriously private about these things, sex and sexuality, he doesn't give anything away for free, never has. They presumed he was straight and when a dono asked, he fell into his stock answer, but he's never been *sure*.

"I dunno what I am, Dream," he says, honestly. He drops his hand to bring his fingers up to Dream's cheek, to bring their faces close together until their foreheads touch. Dream's skin feels precious under his fingertips, his beard the only defense, like George could scrape the skin off if he's not careful with him. He wants to be careful with Dream, wants him to be special, to know he's special. "I just know that there's never been anyone like you. There's never been anyone but you. Not for me."

"Kiss me," Dream turns his head to bring George's palm to his lips, huge hands trapping his smaller hand to Dream's mouth. His lips purse against his palm and George's heart skips a beat. Dream's eyes are dark with desire and George feels a matching pulse in his lower stomach.

"I've *been* kissing you," he says, with every intention of fulfilling Dream's wish.

"No, kiss me proper," Dream whines, voice deep and rumble in George's favorite version of it, their faces so close that George can feel his shaky breath, can choose to fall into him. Dream's nose brushes against his and he says, "I thought I was going insane that night. I wanted to claw inside you."

"You can," George whispers across the millimeters separating them, offering up the thing he's been so scared of without reservation.

"No," Dream scoffs, "I can't that's..."

"Too much?" George guesses, feeling himself smile. Yeah, Dream's just as *too much* as George is. This is going to work. This has to work.

"Yeah, you make me insane," Dream says and then finally crosses the distance and licks into George's mouth. It's a different kiss from the one earlier, from the one the other night, a different vintage with a bouquet of love and lust in concert with each other, notes of insanity in the aftertaste. George wouldn't have it any other way.

He breaks off, panting deeply, face buzzing from Dream's stubble. They stare into each other's eyes and George feels like glass, all his innards susceptible to Dream's gaze, his deepest secrets cataloged and labeled for Dream's perusal. "How about you're welcome to claw inside me if I can claw inside you right back."

The crinkles around Dream's eyes deepen as his face melts into affection. "What's mine is yours, baby," he lets George go enough to pull his hands up and make crab pinching motions. His gut turns over at the allusion to marriage even while George shakes his head, huffing a laugh he can't contain. This fucking idiot.

"Then let's go to our bed," George says, eager to fulfill the promises their bodies have made to each other, "Show me that life altering sex."

"Fuck," Dream says, standing and reaching a hand out to help George stand up. "You really did talk to your mom about sex." Maybe he didn't fully believe him earlier in the car, like George would make something like that up for clout.

"You started it!" George takes the hand and Dream drags him off the barstool and into the cradle of his chest. He doesn't resist the kiss Dream pulls him into, more promises made and ready to

reach fruition.

“Come on,” Dream says, breaking away from George, but holding desperately to his hand, unwilling to let that go. He starts towards the stairs, George following in his wake. “I want you desperately.”

The stairs appear and then George stares shamelessly at Dream’s ass as he precedes him, at the perfect level for George’s gaze. With the hand not in Dream’s grasp, he slaps the left cheek and watches it jiggle under Dream’s sweatpants.

“George!” Dream says, stopping just a moment to gather himself.

“Sorry, your dump truck was just there, looking all enticing,” George says unapologetically.

Dream starts moving again, even faster now, ushering George into the familiar bedroom. George doesn’t get much of a chance to take it in, except to note it’s painfully clean, before Dream catapults him onto the navy bed cover. Dream lands on top of him seconds later, pushing all the breath out of George’s body.

Safety wraps around him along with Dream’s arms. George reaches up and Dream’s already meeting him halfway. His lips are pillowy but demanding and George gives way, allows his tongue inside, brushes it with his own. There’s no fighting for dominance, they’re dancing. Like they do in the kitchen, like they do when they play video games, like they do everything together, collaborative and not combative. Dream steals his breath just as he replaces it, always giving and taking in equal measure.

George pushes on him until they roll over, liking the way Dream looks under him, head cushioned on his pillow and eyes dilated with want. His hair is a mess, his lips red from moving against George’s. His neck is pale and devoid of marks and thus George stretches down to fix that immediately. Dream moans as George moves over him, lips searching his neck for the most sensitive spots, hips minutely grinding, enough friction to chub him up.

Dream’s not idle, his hips meet George’s, his hands keep George pressed against him, taking up his whole entire back. Those crafty fingers slide up inside George’s shirt, hitching the shirt higher and higher until George finally sits up to throw it over his head and onto the cat tower. Their eyes meet, chests pounding in sync for air, and yeah, this is George’s person. This is the love of George’s life and he’s painfully beautiful. He takes a second to sear the sight behind his eyelids so that no matter what’s happening, he can close his eyes and see this, see Dream laid out like a banquet beneath him, a feast for one, bite marks from George clear on his neck.

Impatient, Dream pulls him back down, until their mouths and hips meet. Dream’s huge beneath him causing butterflies to dance in George’s stomach. Dream’s hand drifts lower down his back until his fingers graze the cleft between his cheeks, under his sweats. He can’t help it, he squirms against the feeling, his dick hardening further. A thrill shoots through him, a vestige of Dream’s tongue making itself at home in his ass again, goosebumps appear on his forearms at the memory. Dream’s voice is husky as his fingers rub up and down over George’s hole, “Can I? Again, please?”

“Dream, I’ve been on a plane all day,” he says, full of regret and longing, “I’m not letting you do that to yourself.”

“Why not?” he flat out whines, like George is denying him his greatest wish.

“We have been together for less than three hours, can you please find some chill?” George laughs

against Dream's head, bringing it around again to kiss his lips. His mouth should always be on Dream's. That's like, rule number one. Also, Dream should be naked more. He's going to have to put his foot down on that one.

"Absolutely not," Dream says, pulling back far enough to take George in, to look at him like he's the most beautiful thing in the world. A blush starts at George's cheek bone and works its way all the way down to his navel, the prospect of Dream's wonder making his breath leave his body for the second time in as many minutes. "But we've also kinda been together longer than that, when you think about it."

It's an echo of George's thought from earlier. Maybe Dream was right about them growing together. Sometimes things like this happen, are said, and it strikes George right through the heart that they're so similar. They're different, but complements of each other. His mother is right in that he's complete in and of himself, but fuck if Dream doesn't make him more well-rounded.

"Yeah, I think so, too."

George sits up, straddling Dream's chest and gazes down at him. He lost his shirt and George's eyes trail over his chest. The last time he had the opportunity to look, Dream spent most of the time behind him. The beach, the shower, both of those occasions had George pretending he didn't care, that he wasn't attracted to Dream, but now...

George takes him all in and—he frowns. "What's wrong?" Dream asks, anxiety lacing his voice, turning it a somber burgundy.

"Have you been eating?" George lets his hand travel across the expanse of Dream's chest, it's true that he's thinner than the last time George saw him. His ribs look more pronounced but not in a healthy, fitness conscious way. More like a working out too hard and skipping meals kind of way. Just over a week for this much of a difference isn't good.

How did he miss this?

"George, it's fine," Dream says, distracting him with fingers roving up and down his sides, "Just spent a bit too much time in the office."

"We're talking about this later," George decides to say, not wanting to completely ruin the moment. "You're beautiful," he's quick to tell Dream, reassure him before even a hint of doubt could appear in between them. "Just don't like the idea of you punishing yourself."

"Later, George," Dream says, pushing his hips up hard enough to almost dislodge George.

"Gotta take care of you," George says and he means in all ways—he wants to be the person to knock on Dream's office door and drag him down to the kitchen for food, to be the one to stop him from working too hard, to hold him until he sleeps and maybe drag him back to bed for more rest, until the bags under his eyes disappear. But he also means he wants to rail him.

"Should I start here?" George asks, bringing a hand down to cup Dream's erection through his pants.

A long whine leaves Dream, "Yes, please, anything."

George rubs him a couple times, just enough to work him up further and then backs off. Dream protests with little sounds in his throat, the sexiest things George has ever heard. He pulls himself down Dream's body, adding another love bite to the collection on Dream's pale neck, then mapping his way down, down, down...

He tongues at the thin line of hair that travels from Dream's belly button to the tops of his briefs sticking out of his pants.

"George, please. Need you."

"What do you want, Dream?" George thinks in this moment, that he would give Dream anything he asks for. Anything. The world, the moon, the entire universe. It's Dream's as far as he's concerned.

"You," Dream says simply, sure. George's throat tickles, tight with emotion that he'll never be able to put into words beyond *I love you I love you I love you*. He settles for placing a delicate kiss on Dream's exposed hip bone, trusting Dream to read him and *know*.

"I get that, sweetheart," he manages around the frog in his windpipe, "You can have anything you want. Just have to tell me and I'll do it."

"Anything?"

"Anything," George promises with another kiss.

Dream stares down at him, eyes bright and dark, "I want to eat you again."

He certainly seems fixated on that. Not that George minds, but he's determined to make this about Dream this time. He can't say the words, he can't—but he can do this for Dream. He can show Dream how much he loves him, how much trust and affection he has for him.

"Next round. After we shower," George says, hoping Dream will accept the offer. That he's not saying no, he's saying later. They can do anything together. He wants to talk to Dream about this more, learn everything about him—what turns him on, what he fantasizes about, how he likes to be touched and kissed, how George can do those things for him for the rest of his life and beyond. For now, he wants Dream to come with George's name on his lips.

Dream pouts, a look George has seen more on him in the last couple hours than he ever has before. "You're so demanding."

"Do you want my mouth?"

He watches Dream struggle and only makes it harder as he nuzzles his cock over the sweats. God, he wants to fit his mouth on it. George glances up to see that Dream's made a decision. He says, "Later."

"Then what do you want?" He asks, crawling up Dream's body again, lavishing him in kisses.

"I want *you*," Dream's arms pull him up faster until their mouths meet again, old friends. This kiss is dirtier, pure sex, hotter than some full on sex George has had in the past.

"Dream—" he says, frustration mixing with affection.

"No, I—I want you. Inside, I mean." He can't get enough of the vulnerable look on Dream's face. The implicit trust of his request, it warms the cockles of George's heart. And by warms, he means that it sends a flash of fire down his stomach and into his dick. To be inside Dream, to get to fuck him, to connect like that? God, that's the sexiest thing he's ever heard in his life. He's going to have to start relating sexy things on a different scale. Dream is in a class of his own.

"Okay, sweetheart."

Dream's throat bobs as he swallows nervously, "I've never—"

"Yeah," George snorts, "I figured."

"Shut up."

"Not even any fingers?" George asks, pulling Dream's long fingers to his mouth to kiss them, bless them.

"No, I've—yeah, some fingers," Dream flutters them against George's cheek. Oh, George likes that image. Dream, legs spread and open on this very bed. Maybe George was in his own room down the hallway, unknowing, an idiot, while Dream explored his hole with his fingers. Pure lust drives down George's spine.

"Can I see?" He grabs the fingers again, wondering what they would look like slick with lube and sweat.

Dream's eyebrows shoot up, "You want to watch?"

"I want to see you prep yourself for me," George tells him, licking at his index finger. They'll get lube, George knows they will, but he wants his own spit in there first, closer to Dream's skin. He wants something of himself inside him, too. God, what is Dream doing to him? "Want to see what you look like stuffing yourself. How desperate you get."

"George," Dream moans out, like he, too, can't stand this, like he needs to come right now.

"Did you say my name then, too?" George asks, dying of curiosity. "When you were stuffing yourself with fingers?"

"Yeah."

"Good boy," George praises him, watching the statement cross over Dream's features, how he keens in pleasure from just those words. A shiver runs visibly down Dream's body and George smiles to himself—he did that. Dream wants his words. Dream wants to be good for him.

"George."

"You look so good, baby," George just has to tell him, can't hold it in. He needs to get this moving, he wants to know how Dream looks. Dream obediently lifts his hips when George tugs at his sweats, allowing him to quickly unveil his dick. George almost loses his breath, "God, you're so beautiful. It's obnoxious."

"Obnoxious?"

"Don't want other people to know how handsome you are. They might try to fight me for you," George knows how insane he sounds. He does, okay?

"I'm yours," Dream says, once again like it's the easiest thing in the world to admit. Like it's a universal truth.

"I like the sound of that," George tells him.

"And you're mine, too?"

"Yeah," George's heart pounds in his chest. It's Dream's, really. Belongs to him, beats for him, "I've always been yours."

Dream's smile is quiet, at odds with the heartbeat George feels under his palm. "Somehow, I believe that now."

George plants a kiss on his delicate eyelid, remembering how sweet it felt on the other end of the gesture. His lips map over to the other eye.

How long he yearned for this man, whose face he'd never seen. How special is Dream to make George fall for him with just the force of his personality, his care, his respect, his skill, ingenuity, everything untouchable that makes him the best person in the world? How did George survive without knowing Dream's touch? He could spend all night worshipping Dream, and one day he will, but for now, he wants him to come.

The need is starting to become urgent, a tidal wave on George's side for once. It builds and builds, rising higher and higher until it's imminent from crashing against their shore.

"Come on, wanna see you ride your fingers," George says, sitting up to give Dream space.

"Need lube, babe," Dream says, a little dazed, "It's in the—"

"Where?"

He huffs a shaky breath and waves his hand to the left, "Nightstand drawer."

George bumps their noses together and then flings himself over to grab the bottle. It's small and fuller than he would like it to be. "Are you sure you've..."

"It's a new bottle," Dream says, "had to order a new one online."

He hands it over, uncapped, and Dream handles it with familiarity. He avoids George's eyes, a slight blush over his freckled cheeks, evidence of more time in the sun. He's quick to cover his fingers, and okay, maybe he has done this before.

George sits impatiently next to him, rearranging himself to give Dream space to reach, but close enough to get a good look. He wants to memorize the scene before him, wants to index every expression that crosses Dream's face when his fingers tentatively poke into his hole. He starts with one, as he should. George watches as he teases himself, dick straining, working himself up into a frenzy before he dips the slightest bit in.

"Just do it already," George begs when Dream keeps teasing the both of them.

"Hurts if you don't do it properly, George," he admonishes, but George watches the finger disappear completely inside and notes the sigh of satisfaction that passes Dream's lips.

George reaches a hand down and rubs his cock through his pants, trying to take the edge off. Instead, he manages to work himself up more. Suddenly, it's not enough. As sexy as Dream looks with a finger working himself open, George needs more. He needs it to be *his* finger, *his* dick, just *more*.

"My turn," he says, gathering the lube and generously pouring it over his own hand. Dream opens his legs further, welcoming George in. He starts with two fingers, knowing Dream already stretched himself on one of his own much larger fingers. He opens beautifully, tight and hot. It takes a moment to find that magic button and once George grazes it, Dream's back bows gorgeously, a whimper leaving his lips like a prayer.

"Is that it, baby?" George asks, already knowing the answer, wanting to hear it from Dream.

“Yeah, yeah, again, George, again.”

“You’re doing so good, baby,” George tells him, adding the third finger while Dream’s busy drowning in pleasure. His dick drips precome and George eyes it with his mouth drooling, but now that he’s here, he really wants Dream to come on his dick. He wants the power of Dream falling apart and George’s cock being the reason for it.

With that in mind, he gently pulls his fingers out to Dream’s disdain. “No, what are you doing? I want to—”

“Gonna give you something else,” George offers, grabbing the lube again with his dry hand. “Do you have any—should I get a—”

“No, no, I’m clean,” Dream says, “You’re clean, I want you, just—”

“Okay, okay, baby.”

Dream grabs his legs from behind his knees and proffers up his ass and—fuck, George is going to pass out. There’s a new thing at the top of his Sexiest Moments list. Dream, ass hole first, looking up at him with those eyes, dark and wanting. George takes a deep breath and places a delicate kiss to Dream’s knee. This isn’t just sex, this is the two of them. This is Dream and George. Sure, it’s sexy as fuck, but this is two people giving their bodies to each other because they’re in love. George doesn’t want to forget, doesn’t ever want to forget that.

He lines himself up, freshly lubed, and almost red at the tip he’s so hard. “You’re the most beautiful person I’ve ever met,” he says seriously, meeting Dream’s eyes and watching them water.

“You didn’t even know what I looked like—”

“It’s not just physical beauty,” George enters slowly, letting Dream adjust around him. He’s not the biggest, but he’s not small either. And Dream’s never... this is the first dick he’s taken. Something feral in George perks up, and hopefully the only dick he’ll ever take. “It’s just you, sweetheart.”

“George,” Dream says his name like it’s a benediction. “More, George. I can take it.”

“I’ll give you what I want to give you,” George says, but his hips speak for themselves, pushing closer to Dream’s. He’s all wet heat, sucking George in further, a trap in quicksand that George falls into willingly. He wants to drown in him.

“I like this,” Dream says, squeezing himself around George when their hips finally kiss.

“Don’t do that,” George says through his teeth, “you’re going to make me come like immediately, you idiot.”

“Oh, first I’m beautiful and now I’m an idiot?” Dream asks, but he’s no longer squeezing and it allows George to rediscover his self control.

“You can be both,” he tells him, gathering himself to start thrusting softly, millimeters at a time, carefully watching Dream’s face for any sign of pain. He only finds eagerness, eyes encouraging him to speed up, push harder, reach deeper. Dream brings his legs around George’s hips, beckoning him in like a siren.

George answers the call, he’ll always answer for Dream. Their breaths grow heavy, sweat staring to pool at George’s temples, muscles he rarely uses burn everywhere and he ignores the pain.

Because Dream feels—it's heaven.

Dream's hands roam into his hair, clawing at the strands until pinpricks of pain highlight the pleasure moving from everywhere else in his body. The hands pull his head in, meeting Dream's lips while not pausing the movement in his hips. He can only give Dream a few seconds of a kiss, his breath heavy and weary with the exertion.

"Harder, George," Dream begs, heels digging into George like he can use him like a horse. George wouldn't mind letting Dream ride him later, he's always down for that.

The end is nearing, George can feel his balls set to burst and he can only hope to take Dream with him. He's been avoiding his dick, not because he doesn't want it, doesn't want to know every pore and vein and drop of precome, but because he wants them to come together, or as close as possible. George tugs at Dream's cock, liking how it feels in his palm. God, he's huge. Hard and hot and angled slightly in a way that makes it real, makes it flawed and thus Dream.

"I'm going to come, Dream," he says, using the last bit of energy to push harder, thrust deeper. "Want you to come with me."

"George," Dream says like it's the only word he knows. Like George is his whole world. It's a powerful feeling, one George knows he'll keep chasing and chasing until the day he dies. How many ways can he make Dream fall apart in their lifetime together?

"Are you close, Dream?" he asks, pretty sure of the answer. But he wants to hear it, wants verbal confirmation.

"George," he pants, moans, swears, it's everything and George can hear it all.

"You're doing so great, baby," George tells him. "Feel so good, look so beautiful. Want to see you come. Want to see you come on my cock."

"George!" Dream says, a sense of urgency making George pick up the pace even further. He's now pounding into Dream, every thrust white hot pleasure on his cock, unsure how he's managed to last this long already.

"Dream," he starts to lose himself, a cartoon black out, as for the first time his own need starts to overpower Dream's. Luckily, Dream's in the same boat. And of course he is, they do everything together.

"Coming, George," Dream tells him, and then George feels him explode over his hand, come spilling onto his own chest. The sight of it leads George over the cliff and he's coming three thrusts later. His eyes roll back in his head and the most powerful orgasm he's ever experienced sweeps through his body.

George lands somewhat on Dream's chest, his come sticking to his skin along with the sweat and George groans. He slips as gently as he can out of Dream, even though he wants to stay buried inside him forever. His dicks pops out and a gush of come starts trickling out. Huh, he wants to investigate this further. Maybe he can learn to understand why Dream's so obsessed with rimming.

"Told you that you didn't have to pull out," Dream breathes out and George takes a full sixty seconds to place the reference to their conversation when he was in England. He groans and this time not in a sexy way.

He's barley caught his breath, when Dream sits up and says, "Shower?"

“Already? Don’t you want to relax for a second?”

“George,” he says in that tone of voice that means, *come on*, “I know that was the most physical exercise you’ve done in a while, but—”

“Hey, I walked all around Disney,” George protests weakly, he’s still too exhausted to properly argue, which, yeah, dovetails nicely with Dream’s comment, fuck him, “That was hard.”

“That was also like two weeks ago.”

“Well, since I plan on doing this with you a lot,” he nudges Dream with his elbow, “I guess I’ll be in better shape.” Because there’s no way he’s going to start joining Dream and Sapnap in weightlifting. He’s not some kind of chad, okay?

“Shower,” Dream insists, starting to throw his legs over the side of the bed. He groans and George can’t tell yet if it’s a groan of pain or pleasure. Maybe both. Would be nice if it was both.

“Why are you insisting on a shower right now?” he asks, very aware that Dream has come on his chest and in his asshole, but man that took a lot out of him and, “I want to fall asleep.”

“Well, I want to eat you out,” Dream says, standing to his feet and lording over George like he can intimidate him into the shower and bending over. “You’re the one who insisted on a shower first.”

George looks up at him, scrutinizes his face, and, “Oh my god, are you serious?”

“George, I love you. But I’m really in this for your ass, okay?” Dream’s face is so carefree, happy in the low light of their room. His voice is the same as it ever was, a lighthouse in the storm. “Stop trying to separate us.”

He can tell Dream isn’t going to give up on this. He probably wants a shower just for the come situation. George thinks about leaving him to it alone, staying in the sheets and having to listen to the shower run and know that Dream’s in there bereft of George, and... yeah, he’s weak. He can’t leave Dream alone. He remembers what he told his mum, and it’s still true. He wants to follow Dream into the shower, around the house, through life. He huffs, acting like it’s such an inconvenience for him, “Fine, I guess I’ll shower with you.”

“Idiot,” Dream says, offering a hand to help pull him up. George can tell by the cut of his eyes that he sees through him, knows he’s thrilled to be included in the shower shenanigans. The eyes turn lecherous even though they both came not five minutes ago. “Come on, hurry up.”

Showering together this time goes much differently. There’s less crying on George’s part—still some crying, Dream’s tongue can move mountains. He doesn’t hesitate to lather George’s body in soap the second they step inside the spray, trail a hand down to George’s crack and rub the soap around.

“That good enough?”

“Before you rim me? I mean, it’s your tongue.”

“Then turn around,” Dream commands, manipulating George’s body into the perfect position—hands against the wall and hips out, ass trussed up for him like a Christmas present.

“I missed you,” he barely hears over the rushing water and, fuck, Dream’s talking to his ass.

“Did you just—”

“I think he missed me, too,” Dream says, shameless.

“Of course my ass missed you. All of me did.”

“Okay, simp,” Dream says with a playful slap.

George wiggles his hips in response, the anticipation starting to get him hard again. The warm water sluices off his skin and Dream’s naked body behind him reminds him how good it felt last time they did this. He shudders.

“Dream, what are you wait—” He doesn’t finish the sentence because Dream’s tongue buries itself inside him, no build up, just straight in like Dream couldn’t help himself. He shivers, letting the tongue inside him carry him closer and closer to another orgasm, licking and sucking, a master at the craft. He’s never come as hard as Dream makes him come, every time with Dream he discovers a new level on the richter scale.

Big hands caress his ass cheeks and spreading them farther apart. Dream pulls back a moment, spits on his hole and George shudders. God, why is that so hot? Dream spreads the spit around with a finger, body protecting him from the shower spray, and George starts to get *ideas*.

“Dream,” he says between pants, the shower wall slippery under his pruned fingertips, “Dream I need more.”

“More? But I’m giving it to you so well,” Dream teases, the tip of his tongue punctuating the sentence by digging in again. George moans.

“Fingers, please.”

“Please? You’re so polite when you’re desperate, George.”

“Don’t tease me,” George pleads, “can’t take it. Not right now. Need you.”

“You need these fingers?” Dream asks, something blunt prodding at his entrance.

George isn’t sure if they’re lubed up, he doesn’t much care. Between Dream’s spit and the water from the shower, he’ll make do. “Yes, yes, please.”

Dream buries a finger in his ass and something inside him settles and explodes all at once. This is right, this is where they should be. He hears himself groan, doesn’t bother trying to muffle it. Let Dream know he’s doing well, let him know he’s pleasuring George. He wants it. They both do.

“Feels so good, Dream.”

“Yeah?” he asks, breathless. “Want another?”

“Yes,” George hisses, that’s the best idea he’s ever heard. “Yes, more fingers.”

“Here, baby. Here’s another,” Dream’s finger joins the other and it’s a stretch, one George will gladly take. He’s eager to feel more, wants Dream to reach so far inside him he grazes his heart. Probably need something a bit larger than his fingers for that.

“Bed,” George demands, the idea taking root. “Need lube, need you inside.”

“George,” Dream says, a plea and a question.

“C’mon,” George steadies himself on foal legs and ushers Dream out of the shower. He throws a

towel at Dream, using his own to perfunctorily dry himself and then heads for their bed, laying his towel down to mitigate the wetness. “Dream.”

“I’m right here,” he says, coming up behind and placing a warm hand on his back. George hears him open the lube, still sitting on the night stand where George left it earlier. “I’m here.”

“Need you,” George tells him—the most honest thing he’s ever said. More than just that he loves him, more than he has feelings, a crush, he *needs* Dream. He was ready to fuck up both their lives for the long con of keeping him around, staying relevant in his life. He was willing to forgo this earth shaking sex for Dream’s presence in his life. So, yeah, he needs him. That’s not George’s dick talking.

“Three okay?” Dream asks, voice tight with want. George turns his head, trying to convey to Dream that he needs more than the fingers, he needs skin to skin, he needs Dream over him, he needs his cock. Three fingers stretch him further than he’s gone for a long time.

Dream drips more lube liberally onto his asshole as his fingers move and scissor inside him, until there’s no pain only earth shattering pleasure. Dream flits over his prostate and George howls. Like some kind of psychopath, Dream avoids it, teases it, playing George until he can’t stand it any longer.

“Need you,” George says, pushing his hips back, trying to look inviting to Dream. “Fuck me, please.”

Dream breathes harshly through his teeth, but removes his fingers gently. “Like I said, so polite when you’re desperate.”

“I’ll show you desperate,” George doesn’t even know what he’s saying at this point, he’s stuck on the sensation in his hole and cock.

“I think I’m already looking at it,” Dream puts his hands on George’s hips and pulling him up onto his knees. “And it’s hot as fuck.”

“Dream,” is all George can muster when he feels Dream knocking for entrance at his back door. The tip breaches his hole and George bears down on it, causing another harsh breath from Dream. He feels his hesitation and George isn’t about that, he pushes his hips back, enough to make Dream sink another centimeter inside him.

“Don’t go too fast, baby,” Dream drapes himself across George’s back and whispers into his ear, “Want you to feel good.”

“Already feel so good,” George says, words directed into the pillow below him, “you feel so good, Dream. You’re so good.”

“George,” he moans, dick moving another centimeter. Another torturous minute passes and finally, finally, finally their hips line up again. George doesn’t have a preference, he thinks. Dream inside him, inside Dream, both are great and wonderful and perfect. He likes feeling full with Dream, like he’s plugging up the leak spilling all his feelings out—keeping him together.

Something about being on their hands and knees helps Dream hit his prostate better—the angle catches it just right and Dream beelines in on it, hitting it over and over and over, wave after wave of pleasure crashing over him, through him.

He’s not going to be able to hold himself up much longer, “Dream,” he says, hoping he’ll figure it out.

He does, like he always does. Dream pulls him close to his chest and up until he's sitting on Dream's dick in his lap and, yeah, this angle is good, too. Dream feels so big under him, his shoulders are higher, his thighs thick beneath George. He feels safe, secure, unbelievably good.

"George, are you close?" he asks, mouth a breath from George's ear. The heat from his words melts George. Dream lifts him, just enough that he can thrust up into him, both of them moaning.

"Yeah," he says, feeling the familiar tightening. God, he can't believe it's so good with Dream. Every way, every position, every conglomeration with Dream is this good. "Yeah, I'm gonna—"

He doesn't finish his sentence, just comes all over himself.

"I'm going to eat my come out of you one day," Dream says into his ear and fuck, if he could come again that would do it. He turns his head as much as he can, desperate to kiss Dream, any inch of him. He can sort of get his neck, where it meets his jaw, he licks at the marks he left earlier, greeting them and adding to the picture until Dream takes a deep breath and stills.

He's never felt someone come inside him before. "George, oh my god," Dream says while George squeezes as best he can, wanting to make it good for Dream, heighten his pleasure.

"We're really fucking good at that," George sits up, pulling Dream's spent cock out of his hole. It stings and he's sensitive. Dream helps as best he can while still recovering from his orgasm.

"I'll say," Dream agrees. Once George leaves his lap, he throws himself backwards dramatically. "I think I fucked my brains out."

"Don't you mean *I* fucked your brains out?"

"No, I fucked my own brains out. You did very little, actually."

"Hey!" George takes offense to that.

Dream's smiling, eyes bright with mischief and George loves him. "George, I had to hold up you so we could keep having sex."

"I was tired, I did all the work earlier," he protests.

"You're so lazy," Dream teases him, making gimmie hands to George until he lies down on top of Dream, not caring about the cooling come on his chest. Dream can take care of it.

"You love me anyway."

"I sure do," Dream says, punctuating the sentence with a kiss to George's nose and fuck now he wants to cry. Dream is so sweet with him. He feels taken care of, safe. He knows in a minute or two, Dream will pop up to get a cloth to wipe them down. He'll insist on wiping the come off George, out of George. They'll fall asleep together in this bed, *their* bed, and they'll wake up together and do it all over again as a team.

George can't wait.

"How's your asshole doing?" Dream asks later, much later, when they're both awake, George's

head on his chest, trailing his fingers along the lines of his chest. They'll have to talk tomorrow, more serious talk, make sure they're on the same page for the little details and not just the main chunks. For now, though, George is content to wrap himself within Dream's arms, safe from the world and responsibility.

"I dunno," George answers, "you seem fine to me."

Dream laughs, chest and belly quaking under George. He loves how easily he can make him laugh, delights in it. George joins in until they're staring at each other in the yellow light of the street lamp through the window.

George loses sense of time while they lie there together. He's tired. Exhausted from the plane journey, from the sleepless nights, from fighting himself for so long, but he doesn't want to sleep now. He doesn't want to end this moment with Dream even a second before he has to. He wishes he could spend forever right here. Just here. Lying on Dream's chest and laughing in the dark. The sex was great, fantastic even, but this is truly what he wants with Dream: companionship, understanding, laughter.

"Hi, baby," Dream whispers across the distance. Fuck he's cute.

"I'm baby?" George asks, to annoy Dream. He's not worried anymore. He's not counting how many things he classifies as 'annoying' waiting for Dream to find the threshold and kick him out of his heart. He's not letting the fear keep him from this. "You going to take care of me?" He is. They both know it.

"You're going to take care of *me*," Dream argues, and yeah, George is planning on doing just that. Dream squeezes his ass where his hand rests and then says, cheekily, "I've got an older man now, I'm about to be on my bimbo arc."

"About to be?"

Dream throws his head back in delight, following it with, "Shut up, loser."

"Actually, I think I'm winning here," George says, "At life, too."

His hands drift into George's hair, petting him gently. It feels good, comforting. Dream kisses him on his forehead lighter than a butterfly's wings. "I really love you."

"I still haven't said it," George says to Dream in the safety of the darkness, a knot of guilt sitting heavily in his stomach. He's not good with words, he never has been. Dream knows, accepts this, learned a long time ago to look for George's actions, but still. Someone as special as Dream, as lovely and dear and otherworldly as Dream—"You deserve to hear it. You deserve to know it from my mouth."

"Okay, then say it if you want," Dream says in that same calm manner as he did in the car eons ago, reassuring and logical. His hands don't stop moving in George's hair. "Doesn't make it more true. I *know* it. I *feel* it. You make me feel so loved."

"You shouldn't suffer because I'm not good at saying it," George mumbles, turning his head into Dream's chest.

The chest rumbles under him and George turns his head back to Dream's face, the angle awkward. Dream looks down at him and asks, "Do I look like I'm suffering here?"

He motions down with his hand, like he needs to direct George's attention to the position they're

in, legs intertwined, no room for the Holy Spirit. They're entity cramming in their bed.

"Dream."

"You can say it. You don't have to," Dream says and this convinces George more than anything else how much he's grown. Where is the kid begging on stream for George to say he loves him? "Either way, I know. I know how much this cost you. I know I'm important to you."

He wasn't ready then, not on stream. Not in front of millions of people who could see, could guess the truth. That he loves Dream more than a friend does, loved him even then. He wasn't ready to give that away part and parcel, not for all those eyes. But he can do it now for Dream. Anything for Dream. And he wants him to know.

Knowing how important this is, George pulls himself up. He cups Dream's cheek, beard prickling under his skin, thumb moving over his face so he can feel it when he says, "I love you, Dream."

He blinks. Once. Twice. Then a beatific smile lights across his face, in a category all of its own. George can't wait to put that George Loves Me smile on his face every day for the rest of their lives.

"Yeah, yeah, you're so obsessed with me," he says, happier than George has ever seen him. "I love you too. Of course I do."

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

a look a couple months later

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“He doesn’t like coffee. He doesn’t want coffee,” George wants to tear his hair out. Sapnap is the stupidest person he’s ever met. “You’re trying to like poison him or something.”

“I’m not trying to poison him, oh my fucking god, George.”

“Then why are you—”

“I’m not making him coffee, for fuck’s sake!”

George looks dubiously at the coffee maker Sapnap hauled out and onto the counter not ten seconds ago. Seems mighty suspicious to him that Sapnap would drag out the coffee maker when none of them drink coffee in the house.

“Don’t you think Kate—”

“Shut up!” George leaps across the kitchen to clamp a hand over Sapnap’s mouth. “Why would you—”

If Sapnap ruins Dream’s birthday surprise, he’s going to get Dream to have sex with him in Sapnap’s bed. And not clean up. And also maybe sabotage his hat collection or something since the sex in Sapnap’s bed thing will be a hard sell to Dream.

“She’s going to need some coffee when she gets here. They both will,” Sapnap says after licking George’s hand to get him to move it. George brushes his hand against Sapnap’s hoodie in total, actual, disgust. He needs to like pressure wash himself after that. Gross. “I’m just being prepared.”

“It’s going to look suspicious,” George points out.

“Only if you keep arguing about it,” Sapnap says in return. He looks down at his hoodie where George wiped his germs and laughs to himself.

The bacon pops on the stove top and Sapnap rushes over to mind it again, leaving George to stare helplessly at his own hand like it betrayed him. He walks to the sink, waits for Sapnap to look over at him, and then heaps a load of soap onto his hand. Point made.

“You’re so dumb,” Sapnap tells him and then George washes and washes and washes his hands.

“*You’re* dumb.”

“Hurry up, bro, you gotta do the eggs before he wakes up.”

“Because you burn them,” George snickers to himself, soap still slimy on his fingers. At least he’ll

be super clean after this.

“Well, yeah. I know that about myself and I’m leaning into it. That’s why it’s your job.” Sapnap turns the bacon over, “I get to wake him up!”

Trust Sapnap to take the easy job for himself. Waking Dream up on his birthday, the one day a year he’s not too much of a pansy to do it. At least he knows Dream won’t like it as much as the way George wakes him up. There’s a lot more tongue involved than whatever Sapnap has planned.

“Stop thinking whatever you’re thinking,” Sapnap says, face a map of horror.

Hands finally clean, George turns the sink off and starts wringing his hands. “I’m not think—”

“You’ve got that look on your face. Thinking about Dream’s dick or whatever,” Sapnap shudders and George rolls his eyes. It’s not like he’s wrong.

“Who’s thinking about my dick?” comes Dream’s voice from the front hallway. Sapnap and George meet eyes in shared panic, communicating in the way only old friends, lovers, and relatives can. “It better be my beautiful boyfriend.”

“Congratulations,” Sapnap tells him when he walks into the kitchen wearing the same ratty sweatpants he always wears, “You win this round. It was, indeed, GeorgeNotFound.”

“Happy birthday, baby,” George throws himself into Dream’s arms. It’s a good thing he and Sapnap went over the plan, accounting for every contingency. He knows Sapnap will execute plan F now.

He kisses Dream sweetly, not taking it too far in the presence of Sapnap, for everyone’s sanity, really. Dream pulls back, a contented look on his face and pops one more smackeroo on George likes he just can’t help himself.

“You have to go back to bed, though,” George tries to be stern when telling him this, lowering his head and retrieving his arms from Dream to cross them over his chest.

“What?” Dream’s face falls, “but it’s my birthday.”

“Well, birthday boys get their special birthday breakfasts in bed, don’t they?” George says, losing momentum on this character he’s playing. It’s mid-day, past time for breakfast, but the alliteration is right there.

“Birthday breakfast?” Dream’s eyebrows rise in surprise. He glances over George’s shoulder to the kitchen at large and squints. “Sapnap’s not making the eggs, is he?”

“Fuck off!” Sapnap yells, but it’s in good fun. George and Dream giggle together and George graciously allows Dream to wrap an arm around him, hand resting on his ass. Name a better duo than Dream and George’s ass.

“Seriously, though,” George says, “Go back to bed and let us do this for you.”

“But—”

Sapnap sighs heavily, a world weary thing like everyone is out to get him. “Dude, just go back upstairs. Once I’m done making breakfast I’m going to Punz’ so you guys can like, do whatever. That’s my gift to you. Just don’t tell me about it.”

George meets Sapnap's gaze again, glad to let him do the lying. Sapnap will be leaving the house after breakfast and it will, technically, be his gift to Dream. He just didn't mention that he's not going to Punz' apartment, he's going to the airport to pick up Mum and Neve. That's the real present. Sapnap bought Mum's ticket and George, reluctantly, bought Neve's.

"Going to Punz'?" Dream asks, getting handsy on George's ass where Sapnap can't see it. "For how long?"

"Plenty of time," Sapnap says, pretending to vomit into the bacon.

"Not all day?" Dream asks, a tiny whine in his voice.

"I can come back for dinner," Sapnap says, graciously, "if you want."

"Yeah," Dream squeezes George's hip. "I want to have dinner with both of you."

"Yeah, we'll probably need sustenance by then, anyway," George says just to watch the pleased expression on Sapnap's face turn cartoonishly into nausea again.

"I fucking hate you guys," he says, humor coloring his voice.

"What's up with the coffee maker?" Dream nods at it and George makes sure to glare heavily at Sapnap like *see, I told you, motherfucker*.

Cool as a cucumber, Sapnap shrugs and says, "Thought we might sell it or something, was gonna take pictures."

"That's dumb," Dream tells him. "We need it for when we have guests."

Quackity and Punz used the coffee maker most recently. Quackity spent a week of his summer break with them, streaming and screaming. Punz often spends the night at the house, since they have, you know, actual furniture like real adults—a couch, a table, multiple chairs. If they're not careful, Punz will move himself in without them paying attention. Not that Dream will mind.

Dream loves when they have guests. Now that he's face revealed and met up with George, he keeps inviting people over to hang out. They have an actual guest room now, no free weights or gaming computers to take up all the space. That desire of his is what inspired George for his birthday present.

"Okay, okay, enough criticism. Back upstairs," George ushers Dream out of the kitchen, grabbing the spatula and threatening to chase him with it. Dream laughs at him, but complies.

The eggs come together quickly. He still doesn't cook a lot, but George learned to make Dream's eggs. It's the one thing he likes doing for Dream that he feels he successfully nails every time. Like, outside the bedroom at least. He always nails everything inside the bedroom.

Dream does the majority of the cooking for the whole household, including a new cat food that Patches adores passionately. She refuses to eat anything else so now Dream spends an hour a week meal prepping for his cat. God, George is so in love with him.

He checks the time and excitement stirs in him when he sees how close they're getting. "You have the—" George whispers to Sapnap, carefully choosing his words. Dream has ears like a hawk and a clever mind, it's nearly impossible to pull one over on him.

Nearly.

“Yeah,” Sapnap says, grabbing his Tesla key and foisting it in his pocket. “Are you good to finish up here?”

The bacon sits in its grease to stay warm and George has only a minute on the eggs before he adds Dream’s special cheese. Sapnap picked a bouquet at the grocery store when he went to get the supplies. Sappy boy. They both know Dream loves that shit, though.

George looks at the tray Sapnap arranged, ready with fork and glass of chilled water, just missing the food, and nods. Yeah, he’s got this.

“Okay, I’ll text you when we’re like twenty minutes out,” Sapnap’s voice is so low George has to strain to hear him. “That should give you enough time to—”

“I’ll figure it out,” George says and it won’t be difficult. All he has to do is say one thing and Dream will jump to make it a reality.

Sapnap leaves with one final look of shared excitement and George takes over. He finds the worst picture in his camera roll that’s also not incriminating and posts it to twitter with a happy birthday message that’s not overly sentimental. That’s not George’s style.

Then, all he has to do is bring the breakfast upstairs.

“Really, George?” Dream greets him from their bed, phone brandished in his hand and an amused smile on his face. “You had to go with that picture?”

George balances the tray and sets it down neatly in Dream’s lap, not spilling a drop, thank you very much. “You know I had to.”

“You didn’t, though,” Dream says, tucking into the eggs. He knows he did it right when Dream’s eyes open in pleasure. Food pleasure looks different than sexy pleasure on Dream’s face. It’s one of those things George counts himself lucky to know, even luckier still to be able to put both on his face.

He perches next to Dream while he eats, careful not to move too drastically and topple the tray, recounting the entire morning spent arguing with Sapnap while Dream eats, laughing in between bites. Dream takes one last bite and then moves the tray carefully to the nightstand.

“C’mere,” he says, crooking a finger at George who follows easily, “need to give you a proper thank you kiss.”

It’s a sweet kiss, quickly devolving into something hungrier. George likes where this is going. He sits on Dream’s lap and feels him start to stir. “Need to give you a proper birthday blow job.” Again, the alliteration is right there.

“George!”

“Why are you always surprised?” he asks, watching Dream’s Adam’s apple bob while he laughs freely into the air.

“I don’t know,” he whines, “I really don’t.”

“It’s cute,” George hides his face in Dream’s neck so the words are almost lost.

Later, the text comes when George still has the taste of Dream on his lips. In the grand scheme of things, it hasn't been long.

"Uh oh," Dream says, eyes taking in the text Sapnap sent.

George already knows the words, helped come up with them ages ago when they sent Dream to his mum's house and came up with the entire plan, Mum and Neve on speaker. "What?" he asks, looking down at the bedsheets to avoid Dream's eyes—knowing he'll see right through him. George can't keep anything from Dream. He doesn't want to be the one to ruin everything.

"Sapnap says he's coming back," Dream frowns but it's not as pronounced as it would have been before George sucked his brain out. "Something about forgetting Punz was out of town or something."

"He can just go wander through the mall or something," George says because that's something a George who had an entire day of sex planned would say if Sapnap came home unexpectedly. They can have sex with Sapnap in the house, they have before. It's just weird when Sapnap knows exactly what they're doing.

"He says he already tried that and he's bored. We have like thirty minutes, though."

"I can make you come again in thirty minutes," George says with confidence. He's made Dream come in way less time. He's proud of that fact, almost wishes they'd put it on his Wikipedia page. Maybe his MCC stats page. "No problem."

"I was going to eat you out," Dream says, a little disappointment in his voice now. Fuck, George's dick makes a triumphant recovery.

A thought clicks in George's mind. Here's the path to victory. He doesn't want to smell like sex when his mum and sister get here anyway. "You can still do that," he promises. "Shower?"

Anticipation lights up Dream's eyes and without saying it aloud, they race each other into the bathroom. Dream wins with his long legs and ruthlessness, but George is going to be the real winner here, so he lets him have it. Call it another birthday present, whatever.

"I win," Dream can't stand to let it go, unlike George who is calm and not at all disappointed.

George hears the garage door as they step back into the bedroom and knows it's time.

"Sapnap's home," George says, unnecessarily. He's clad in only a towel and even that's only for the warmth. He loves being naked in front of Dream, for Dream. He likes it even more when Dream's naked for him, too.

"He can wait another minute," Dream gathers George close to him, skin warm and comforting

against George's. Water clings to his strong chest, more filled out than in the days after the last time George returned from England.

George reaches up on his tippy-toes, placing a kiss to Dream's mouth. Fuck, the things this mouth does to him. The things it says, the sensations it gifts him, the smiles he earns, he loves all of them in equal measure.

"We need to get dressed and go downstairs," he says, hearing the gravitas in his own voice.

Dream cocks his head, not missing the tone either. "What do you—"

"Dream," he says, turning to their shared dresser and pulling out briefs for both of them. "Get dressed."

"But I don't—"

"I think you're going to be really mad in about five minutes if you're naked."

"How can I ever be mad when I'm naked next to you?" Dream asks, provoking something low in George's belly, like they didn't just go two rounds.

"What if it's not just me?"

He tracks the confusion on Dream's face, watching him put things together in real time. It's fascinating, watching the connections come together live. "Who else is it? Surely not just Sapnap."

George throws a shirt at Dream, one he loves to see on him, one that brings out the green in his eyes. "Put some clothes on and find out."

"George," Dream says, pulling the material over his head obediently. "George, what did you do? We said no parties."

"The party is tomorrow," George says with a shrug, because it is. But it's not a party in the traditional sense of the word. It's Dream's family, George's family, and several friends who live close by. "This is different."

"What did you do?" he repeats, grabbing the same pair of sweatpants off the floor. George takes them out of his hand and tosses them back on the floor, closer to the laundry hamper. He picks up his favorite pair of Dream's jeans and hands those over with a *trust me* look.

Dream rolls his eyes and puts them on while George scrambles to find a suitable outfit for himself. Once dressed, they look each other over. As tempting as it is to rip the clothes right back off of Dream, he's impatient to go see Mum and Neve.

"C'mon, let's go greet our guests."

"Who's here, George?" Dream asks. There's no anxiety in his voice, too much trust between them for George to disappoint him. And Dream knows that.

George smiles, letting the excitement take him over. "You'll see."

"George."

But George is already leaving the room, leading Dream by his hand. He looks back, scanning Dream's face and is thrilled to see him starting to get excited. George watches his expression as he walks backwards down the hallway, knowing Dream won't let him fall or trip.

There's noise coming from the kitchen—laughter and Patches' yowling, the sound and accompanying smell of coffee brewing. George catches Dream's eye again, curious to see if he's figured it out, if he recognizes the laughter in their kitchen. How many times have Mum and Dream made each other laugh in the months of their friendship, George wonders. He knows they talk of deep things, things that only the two of them can hold for each other, but there's evidence of lightness within them as well.

George has watched Dream and Mum's video upwards of fifty times. It's his favorite piece of art in the world, catered for him specifically. He plays it when Dream leaves the house for business or to hang out with his family one on one. He plays it when he misses Mum and it's too late to call her. He plays it when he's fucking around in the kitchen and Dream's too busy to keep him company, or on a play date with Sapnap, the two of them taking time to keep their friendship strong in the wake of George and Dream's relationship. No one was happier for them, but at the suggestion of their therapist, they made steps to ensure Sapnap never feels left out. He's an integral part of the Dream Team, after all.

"Kate?" Dream says, half question, half like he's calling out to her, voice soft and disbelieving. George feels more than sees Dream confirm his suspicions, and then he's off to the kitchen, leaving George to scramble behind him. He enters the kitchen himself to see Dream already twirling Mum around, her body tiny in his arms.

"Are they always like this?" Neve asks from the barstool, a half empty bottled water in front of her like she just chugged it. George sits down next to her and elbows her fondly.

"Yeah, it's a bit much."

"You love it, you freak," she says and rolls her eyes. She pounds the rest of the water back and stands up.

"Dream," Mum says, breathless as Dream deposits her back onto the floor but won't take his arms off her shoulders, like if he lets her go, she'll disappear. "It's so good to see you, honey."

"You too! You too, I—" he scans her, likely taking in any changes. Dream always does this when he hasn't seen someone in a while. "Kate, what are you doing here?"

"Well, is it your birthday, or not?" she asks, one eyebrow arched.

"It is, but—"

"And I missed you and George and Nick, so—"

Dream scoffs playfully, "You talk to me and George almost daily, that can't—"

"Hey!" Sapnap says, "Kate and I talk every day, too, you know."

"You do?" George asks, incredulous. He knows they get along, certainly, but Mum and Sapnap speaking daily? About fucking what?

"Yeah, you do?" Dream echoes him, looking searchingly between them.

Kate laughs loudly, more of a release of joy than anything else. "We do, don't we, Nick? But you've been very quiet today."

Sapnap's eyes turn mischievous, in the way George has learned means trouble for him specifically. "Been saving up for a good one today."

“Oh?”

“What the fuck is going on?” George asks.

“Kate and I are Snapchat buddies,” Sappap says like he isn’t rocking George’s world. “We try to find the worst pictures of you and one up each other. I’m winning, by the way.”

“You’re not,” Kate denies, “I’m just handicapped by not being able to use the naked bath pictures.”

“Mum!” George protests while Dream laughs hysterically behind her.

“What? I said I *don’t* use those.”

“I can’t believe you and Mum Snapchat,” Neve says to Sappap, verbally batting at him like a cat. It makes George nervous seeing those two interact. They’ll either get on like a house on fire or actually set the house on fire. Either way, there’ll be flames and carnage.

“I can’t believe you had that matching bowl cut with George in 2003, but here we are,” Sappap says and the kitchen devolves into pure chaos.

Even Neve gives into the laughter, letting the burn slide off of her just as she slides off the barstool like Sappap shot her in the chest. They all laugh even harder. Dream walks over to her on the floor, one hand on his stomach like he does when the kettle gets the better of him.

He holds out the other hand to George’s sister and George stops laughing immediately. He hasn’t spent too much time thinking about the two of them meeting, not while he knows that nothing about Neve’s opinion would sway George from staying here with Dream. But he still wants his sister to like his boyfriend.

Neve shoots up with ease, Dream yanking her to a full standing position like he barely put any effort into it. It’s hot, George will admit. She smiles shyly at Dream and isn’t that strange? To think of Neve as being shy in any regard, not when she’s the loudest, brashest, harpy he’s ever met.

Dream looks her up and down and George just knows he’s comparing her to George—noticing their similar heights, their shared dark hair. Everything else in her face is Mum, though.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Neve,” Dream says, using the hand he’s still holding to pump hers up and down. “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Probably only the annoying stuff,” she says with a wry smile, looking more like the Neve George knows and loves.

“I can read between the lines with George. He adores you,” Dream says with a soppy smile, like he’s not giving out precious information. Neve doesn’t need to know that! Big brothers are supposed to protect their sisters and make their lives hell, not whatever this is.

Neve looks over at George with a challenge in her eyes, asking if it’s true. He huffs out a breath and says, “You’re my little sister,” like that explains everything. It should. She knows, they’ve gone through more shit together than almost anyone else in the world. He’s only been through more shit with Dream and— “But so is Sappap.”

“Aw, bro, you adore me?” Sappap says instead of getting irritated at being called his little sister. God, full on attacks from all sides. When will he know peace?

“Alright, alright,” Mum says, the voice of reason. He purposefully disregards the knowledge that

she's been sending pictures back and forth with Sapnap. That's in the past. He's grown since then. "Leave poor George alone."

"Yeah, he can't handle talking about his wittle feewings," Neve says, reaching over to pinch at George's cheek.

"I'm working on it," he says, bristling, because yeah, he is working on it. Hard, too. He started with Dream, making sure he knows he's loved and he's been talking with their therapist about how to be more open, like, emotionally. Sure, it doesn't and never will come naturally to him, not like Dream, but he's making strides, okay? It's nothing to turn his nose up at.

"You are, baby," Dream says, his partner in all things, including therapy. He knows the road George's been walking, been in the trenches with him. He pulls him into his arms, and just like that George feels himself calm down. "You're getting so good at emotions, now."

"How this for feelings, Neve," George challenges her, "You're annoying me."

She snorts, more amused than offended, "Then I've done my job, here."

"You're sleeping the garage," George declares, leaning against Dream's chest.

"Hey!"

"You're not in the garage, Neve," Mum says, slipping into the role of peacemaker like an old pair of shoes. "You're in the guest room with me."

"You guys are millionaires, you don't have another guest room?"

"You're lucky we have that one," Dream says, voice rumbling in his chest and into George's.

"I'd offer to share mine—" Sapnap begins and George wants to throw up. "But you were mean to me."

"That's the only reason why?" Dream whispers into George's ear sarcastically and no. No no no nonono. That's not going to be a thing.

"Dinner," George says, stepping away from Dream and clapping his hands loudly. Everyone's eyes turn to him at the sound and, now that he has their attention, repeats himself: "Dinner. Birthday dinner for Dream. I made reservations."

"You didn't!" Dream says, excitedly, "Where did you—"

"Remember where we went on our first date?" George asks, fully aware his heart is falling out of his eyes. That was one of the best nights of his life. Dream took him out, fed him great food, they talked about everything they want out of life, what they want out of their relationship, their goals, their dreams. George knew by the end of that night that Dream would propose within the year. He's ready to say yes.

"Oh gross, I cannot spend the next two weeks watching whatever the fuck this is," Neve complains and Sapnap raises a hand for a high five which she doesn't grant.

"Welcome to my life," Sapnap says, turning his hand to Kate for the high five since Neve snubbed him. She grants it. "Hey, Kate, you wanna stream with me while you're here this time?"

Her eyes light up. George groans.

Later, after short naps for the women, they all squeeze into Sapnap's Tesla, opting not to take Dream's car since no one trusts George, Sapnap, and Neve in the backseat alone. There's no question that Mum gets the front, no matter who's driving. It's not even a discussion.

They talk over each other at the restaurant, all eager to catch up and Dream excited to get to know Neve. George can see her falling for his charm, the earnestness in his questions about her life getting to her. It's funny to watch. She's been on the periphery of his life with Dream for a while—quick to send a meme about them, taking pictures of merch she sees IRL, teasing George in person about their feelings for each other. But it's entertaining seeing her encounter him, the physicality of Dream, how he rewards you with a real laugh that crinkles his eyes as it steams out of him, the way his head tilts when he's listening deeply, following it up with a question so intelligent it makes you stop in your boots, question everything. His hair flops in his eyes in a distracting way, making him toss his head so he can see again—he's unaware of the inherent sexiness of the gesture. George is sure, he's done experiments. Dream who's being sexy on purpose is a different guy, it's put on movements and mannerisms, like he's playing a role convincingly. Dream just as he is, is infinitely sexier and he has no fucking idea. George is keeping this one close to the chest lest he use this power for evil.

Anyway, Neve stands no chance in the sunlight that is Dream's entire being. She blossoms under it.

He turns away to pay attention to Sapnap and Mum, talking low to each other. Sapnap points at something on the menu and Mum shakes her head. "... last week with Jeremy, so I—" he hears, the rest getting lost across the ambient noise of the restaurant and Dream explaining MCC to a suspiciously curious Neve. She's never wanted to hear about Minecraft from *him*, but Dream... sure, why not?

"Who's Jeremy?" George asks, causing both Sapnap and Mum's eyes to shoot up at him, like they weren't expecting him to hear their conversation.

"Oh," Mum says, face turning pink under the low light in this joint. She looks down at the menu again, gazing up and down searchingly, too fast to really be taking anything in. "Just a man I've— Just a friend."

"I've never heard of Jeremy," George says, hoping to hear more about this bloke now.

"He's a new friend, dear."

"More like *boyfriend*," Sapnap says under his breath but it's just as the loud table next to them falls into a lull of silence so George hears him. He gasps.

"A boyfriend?" He looks to Mum who's turning even redder across from him. "You're seeing someone?"

"George, I—"

Too late. George elbows Dream, pulling him out of his conversation with Neve who looks a little relieved to be spared the inner details of Sands of Time and why George is the number one player.

"Sorry, Kate," Sapnap mumbles across the table, but George blocks him out.

“Dream!” he elbows him again, even though he has his attention.

“Yes?” he asks, bringing the arm that was around George’s shoulders down to rub at his ribs. George might owe him an apology later.

“Mum has a boyfriend!” He imparts the information, expecting Dream to be just as stunned as he is. He expects Dream to start asking questions about this Jeremy guy—who is he? Where does he work? Where did they meet? He doesn’t do any of that. He looks—he looks resigned.

“No she doesn’t, George,” Dream sighs patiently, “They’ve just gone on a few dates.”

“You knew about this?” he hisses through his teeth.

“Yeah,” the little furrow of confusion appears between his eyebrows. “I thought you did, too.”

“Ugh, you aren’t the right person to talk to about this,” he pushes Dream back against the seat so he can talk over him to his sister at the head of the table, “Neve!”

“What?” she says after taking a deep sip of her water, like she was waiting for a chance but didn’t want to be rude to Dream.

“Mum has a boyfriend?!”

“George,” Mum says, exasperated, “It’s not—”

“Not her boyfriend,” Neve confirms, her mouth turning into a smile. “But I dunno why he isn’t. He’s totally old guy hot.”

“Neve!” George is scandalized. Totally scandalized. How can Neve—how can she be okay with this?

He’s not sure why he’s feeling this way. Mum is a grown, mature, woman. She can do whatever she wants, she *can*. But it feels too soon. It’s only been a couple months since she split with Dad, should she really be—Ugh, he’s being a dick, isn’t he?

“George, babe, you need to chill about this,” Dream whispers against his temple. Dream’s skin against his serves to help calm him down.

“Why is this the first I’m hearing about this?” he whispers, really only expecting Dream to catch it. It irks him that everyone at the table seems to know about it. Everyone except him. Why wouldn’t they tell him?

“Probably because you’re reacting like this,” Neve says, smirk present on her face. She shares a look with Dream that George doesn’t care for at all. “Here, look at this.”

“Neve, why do you have pictures?” Mum rubs her hand over her eyes, like she’s starting to get a headache.

Neve thrusts her phone into George’s face and there’s a photo of an older gentleman with his arm around George’s mother. He’s handsome, George will give him that. He looks kind.

“You’re right,” Dream says to Neve, “Old man hot for sure. He could get it.”

“Dream!” George says, but he’s laughing this time. Dream has a way of pulling him out of his own head.

“What, you were thinking it, too,” Dream continues to know him better than anyone else, because yeah maybe he was thinking that a little bit. Dream waggles his eyebrows and George despairs whatever is about to fall out of his mouth: “Threesome?”

“Oh my god, you’re fucking worse than George,” Neve says, betrayal on her face. George is very familiar with the look. “And that’s saying something.”

“Dream, I don’t think Jeremy wants to fly to Florida to have a threesome with my son and son-in-law,” Mum says. She’s circled around to being amused.

“Like anyone would want to touch either of you with a ten foot pole,” Sapnap says, another look of disgust on his face. It’s almost like his default state these days.

George feels Dream shrug, they’re sitting so close together. “We could fly him in. Maybe fly there, I’m flexible.”

“Hey, only I get to see you be flexible,” George says and Neve mimes throwing up to Sapnap who then starts, too. He even catches Mum give a pretend dry heave into her napkin. God, they’re fucking ridiculous. They’re going to get kicked out of this restaurant.

The rest of dinner goes smoothly. The waiters sing happy birthday to Dream and Sapnap records it so they can make it into part of Dream’s birthday vlog, to be continued tomorrow when the small party happens.

George manages to apologize to Mum once they get home and she accepts it easily. She apologizes for letting everyone else know but him. There’s an easy forgiveness he didn’t know they could ever reach six months ago.

George hears in person about her painting lessons, catching her eyeing the canvas proudly displayed on their wall with a little proud smile. She talks about moving to Nottingham when Neve starts her new job there, a fresh start for both of them. Mum managed to find a part time position to help her get back into teaching and she’s anxious and excited to start. He talks about video ideas, a stream planned with Karl next week, the present he bought for Dream to open tomorrow at the small get together, how he’s interested to see how their families get along.

They talk a bit about things with Jeremy and things with Dream.

“I’m so glad you’re happy, honey,” Mum says over her glass of wine.

“I’m glad you’re happy, too,” George says and he means it. He’s glad she got out of a marriage that wasn’t making her happy. He’s glad she prioritized herself, glad she lent him the strength to go for it with Dream. He never would have without her advice.

“Now go to bed,” she drains the rest of her glass, “Birthday boy needs his real present.”

“He already got it twice this morning. And last night,” George says without thinking.

Mum laughs loudly, delighted, while George feels the blood drain from his face. There’s nothing to be ashamed of. Mum knows they have sex. Mum knows they have great life altering sex. It’s not a secret, but it still feels weird to talk about it. “Good for you, honey. I’m glad you’re taking care

of each other.”

“Night, Mum,” he says before he can shove his foot even farther into his mouth.

Up in their room, Dream’s already in bed. He’s back in the ratty sweatpants, sans shirt, and he’s scrolling through his phone. George’s phone beeped a couple times in the last hour so he assumes Dream’s on twitter responding to things.

“Hey, handsome,” Dream greets him. “Go brush your teeth and then get in here.”

“Yes, dear,” he says just to make Dream laugh. It works and he lets the sound of his partner’s happiness follow him into their en suite.

What a great day. Almost all of his favorite people are under his roof, a stone’s throw from him. His mum, his sister, his brother, his boyfriend. He’s so happy, so brilliantly, overwhelmingly, achingly happy.

Spitting out the last of the toothpaste, he washes his mouth out and then joins Dream under the covers. Dream puts his phone on the nightstand to charge, right next to their half empty bottle of lube. Things with Dream are so, so good.

He rolls himself over onto Dream’s strong chest, one of their favorite positions. He listens to Dream’s heart beat loudly under his ear, a promise between beats that it does so for him. George nuzzles into Dream’s chest and with eyes closed, says, “Sometimes I think I was put on earth to love you.”

Dream’s arms come up around him, scooping him into the cradle of his love and he kisses him so delicately that George might cry. He might already be crying.

“Then they did a perfect job with you, huh?” He whispers down into George’s ear, “You’re exactly who I want to love me.”

Chapter End Notes

I needed Dream and Sapnap to meet Neve. And I needed us to see Kate one last time. Readers, I really love her.

Thank you thank you thank you for all the people who have reached out and said they liked this story. Means the world. Feel free to leave a comment or reach out on twitter or tumblr whenever you read this--no time limit. This fandom has been so welcoming and so giving and I wanted to thank you guys for that.

- Scoops

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!